

Arrows and Lasers

by

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[Warning: Contains Sexual Situations]

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Chapter 1

"Work harder!" the guard shouted.

John tore away at the stone with the iron bar as if it was one of the Lizzars who held him captive as a slave. Forced to work during the day and have sex at night, he longed for freedom for reasons different from the others around him. Having five women to cater to him exclusively wasn't his idea of paradise when he wanted much more. He pried away more rock and tossed it into the hopper. Once full, a captive centaur would haul it away. While he worked, he listened to the guards talk. They had no idea about maintaining security. Consequently, lots of rumors were spread among them. Most of them were more factual than not.

"We shall have the ore soon to complete another tractor beam site. Once it's in place, we'll have more slaves, right sir?"

The Lizzar leader nodded. "Keep these slaves working. Another week should see the new site in action. Then we shall defeat the centaurs and their remaining human allies. They'll be our slaves or dead. Tomorrow, we shall move these to another camp. The mines here are filling with poison."

John was concerned that another town like his might be ripped away from the Earth and brought to this world where its inhabitants would be quickly captured, stripped of everything they owned, and forced to work as naked slaves for the rest of their lives. Their slave work only interrupted by

minimal sleep, food, water, and forced sex to produce more slaves.

His town had almost fought off the Lizzars, but ran out of ammunition. Only ten people were still free along with five carloads of books saved from the school library. He hoped they were busy educating the centaurs so they could not only catch up, but surpass the Lizzars in technology on a world that was definitely strange in more ways than he could have imagined.

The Lizzars had made the leap past swords and spears to electricity and lasers. The centaurs were still in the bronze age. John's efforts before being captured had stimulated them and given them hope of beating the Lizzars. Now their destiny was all up in the air again. If the Lizzars succeeded in bringing another piece of Earth to their world, they could easily negate any advances the centaurs made and surpass them with their existing industrial edge. If that happened, the Lizzar boast of enslaving them would come true.

Without any way to tell time, John worked by the electric light as he dug into the rock for precious ore while several armed guards watched him and others. Were he not chained by his ankles, he might have been able to fight back and escape.

"Leave your tools! Time to produce!" the guard hollered out.

John and the teenage boys captured with him dropped their tools and walked behind the hopper being drawn by a centaur. When they reached the mine entrance, the sun was almost completely down below the horizon. He and the boys accepted their meal, a fruit that provided both liquid and solid nourishment. They ate as they walked along behind one guard and flanked by others. When they reached the slave quarters, their work guards remained by the doorway while they went inside where other guards were stationed.

John made his way to his women and went down on the first one he came to. Much as he appreciated getting blow jobs to start off with and other foreplay, the guards didn't allow that as it was wasteful of semen. He thrust himself into her while she smiled at him.

"Hard day at the office, Dear?"

"Yeah, hard day, Victoria. The Lizzars are making another tractor beam site like the one our town fell on when it arrived. They're planning on recreating their experiment now that they know what they created so they can capture another piece of Earth and bring it here."

"Once I balloon up, you're going to have to get the others pregnant. We won't be able to hide it then."

"I know, but at least taking you first uses up most of what I've got to

give. I never dreamed before of getting you pregnant. I hope you're not upset."

"Well, at least it's you and not some teenage boy who reminds me of Conrad. I arranged for Kitten to be next tonight. Okay with you?"

"Is she?" asked John.

"Yes, she is. She's rather happy about it since it's yours," Victoria answered.

"Maybe so, but I don't like the idea of our children being born into slavery," he said.

"None of us do, but they've got us chained. We're not going to escape anytime too soon, it appears."

"Who's after Kitten?"

"Cheryl, then Amandalee, and Melanie. Cheryl's not sure yet, but she could be also."

"Great, just fucking great," John muttered.

"Not too loud. I've heard that they intend to rotate women to whoever's successful. That won't help us in the long run if we succeed in escaping. Then we might never know whose child was fathered by who."

"Sure we will. Everyone will just figure that it's probably me," John muttered.

"What else did you learn?"

"There wasn't anything else of importance that my guards said. What about the others?"

"I've been passed along reports that the Lizzars are losing laser towers along the border. The centaurs are hitting them hard so they have to put troops everywhere to keep the centaur cohorts from making deep incursions."

"Good for them. Any idea how they're doing it?"

"Yes, but the Lizzars are puzzled. The bodies didn't have any marks on them."

John thought immediately of the cache of chlorine gas bombs made with items from the grocery store and condoms. He remembered that the attacking Lizzars were too close to use the condom bombs without gassing his own force. From the description, he felt sure that the centaurs now had that cache of bombs and were using those to their advantage. It would be only too easy to slip up in the two hour period of total darkness on the planet and toss one or two inside the aperture of the laser tower to drive the troops inside it out to where they could be killed. Then he realized that there weren't any marks on the bodies. John hoped the centaurs weren't

wasting all their resources too quickly. Once those were gone, there wouldn't be any replacements.

"Change!" a guard ordered.

John withdrew himself from Victoria and went down on Kitten. She smiled up at him and gyrated her hips to make him release as much of his semen as possible before he could get to the other women. He felt himself come, but continued to thrust himself into her as it was expected of him by the guards. When the order came to change again, he slipped his limp member out of Kitten and went over to Cheryl. He fondled himself briefly to stimulate an erection before inserting himself into her. Had he not, she would have been whipped.

The first few days in slavery were enough to convince him and everyone else to do as they were told. The only good thing about reaching the mines after a four day walk was that they found Ty and Earl still alive. Earl was given four women and Ty received one because of their size. John was surprised to find that he just barely edged out Earl. For that reason, he was given five women, chosen from those closest to him at the time. Most of the boys had one girl. A few had two or three whom they switched among each time the guards ordered them to change. Those boys with only one girl had to remain on top of the same girl until they were told they could stop.

During the day while the men were in the mines, the women received the ore outside the shafts. They broke it into smaller chunks before sorting it into grades and sending it on. Like the men, they wore chains attached to their ankles so they couldn't move very far from where the guards wanted them to be. Only rarely could they even talk with the centaurs held as slaves. When they did, they tried to pass on to each other as much information as possible while attempting to devise a plan of escape.

"I spoke with a centaur today. They like the last idea but they're still unsure how they'll get free of their own chains to take part," Cheryl said.

"I'm still working on that. However, I think our best chance is going to be freeing them after the guards are taken out. At least, the guards don't inspect our chains. That much is going our way."

"Change!" the guard ordered.

John went to Amandalee. He entered her easily and proceeded to give her what he could, though he hoped he was shooting blanks. He suspected there was a difference in physiologies between humans and Lizzars that the Lizzars weren't aware of. He felt that the Lizzars might believe that humans could dole out their semen like they could, if indeed the Lizzars

could. As well, he wondered if Lizzar females were given to their males based on size. If so, John was sure the last laugh would be on them someday when they either became extinct or somehow learned before it was too late that size really meant nothing. Except that it was often considered impressive.

As he screwed Amandalee, he wondered if his size was part of his own sexual allure to the girls who were once his high school students. After all, they once had a photo of him nude in the pool that they passed among themselves while referring to him as an Adonis. Similarly, some of the girls he had beneath him as a slave were still eager to have him despite their circumstances. He remembered when they were separated into units of one male and however many females the Lizzars calculated a male capable of handling, there was almost a fight among some of the girls wanting in his unit. Only Victoria's stern stare at them had prevented such a disaster from occurring. Still, John couldn't get over the fact that four or five more girls would have willingly been his to screw each night, even without love involved in the equation.

"Change!"

John settled down on Melanie. She wiggled her ass seductively as he entered her and smiled in the dim light furnished by the Lizzars' crude command of electricity.

"I should have offered myself to you long ago. You're actually quite good."

"Thanks. I would have asked you but I was too busy and prideful. I didn't want it to appear like I was using my position to have all the women."

"What I'm most surprised by is how well you handle yourself. I've always heard that men with big cocks aren't really good lovers."

"I never heard that one. All I know is that it's supposed to be technique, not size that makes the difference."

"Then you've definitely got technique down pat. Actually, you're rather fun. I look forward to our nights now."

"Even though the ultimate aim of our hosts is for me to get you pregnant?" he asked.

"Yes, despite that. Any progress on our escape plan?"

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Over Commander Zira said, as he drew on a sheet of paper, "Okay, we

know where the mines are that the humans were sent to. We'll launch two more attacks on these towers here as a diversion. We'll send in six cohorts here to draw off the Lizzar reaction. Two cohorts will enter the mine area while six more block off any reinforcements. Our primary concern is to free the humans. Any warriors we free are a bonus. Be sure all warriors carry a full load of arrows for their bows. Commander Haro's First Cohort will carry the tools from Earth to break their chains. Second Cohort led by Sub-commander Theo will deal with the guards. As soon as any humans are freed from their chains, they are to be carried away to safety. That way, if we can't prevent reinforcements from reaching the mines, we'll have secured the release of some prisoners. Even one human freed is better than nothing."

"Should we seek out Coach Weaver first?" Commander Haro asked.

"Take whoever you find first. There will be little enough time as it is to deal with the guards before the Lizzar forces respond. I only hope that we don't have to leave any behind," Over Commander Zira answered.

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John stood in disgust as his chains were inspected. Only earlier in the day, one of the boys had at last managed to cut through the soft iron chains with a rock. Instead of waiting for others to escape with him, he took off on his own. The boy almost made it except for the laser tower that John didn't know was positioned near the new camp. The boy's upper torso and lower half were dragged back into the mining camp for everyone to see.

Some of the chains on the boys were changed while their quarters were searched for anything to cut with. His own were changed anyway though there wasn't a mark to be seen on them. As soon as John wore new chains, he was ordered back into the mine. He didn't come back out of it until after sundown. He suspected that was a form of punishment.

He entered the slave quarters and almost immediately noticed that he had another woman. John concluded that Rebecca, who once worked in the school administration office, was in the dead boy's unit.

Victoria welcomed John with her open legs and whispered as he settled himself into her, "Rebecca's already pregnant, in case you wonder later who the father was."

John grunted as a guard was watching a bit too closely for his peace of mind.

"You aren't fondling her to make her receptive! Fondle!" the guard

ordered.

John slipped his hands over Victoria's breasts. "Sure takes the fun out of what used to be fun."

"Doesn't it, though? Disgusting little Lizzar! I'd like to fondle him a bit with one of those iron bars we use to pound rocks."

The guard glared down at her briefly, then stomped away to speak with his leader. The guard came back a little later.

"Get off her! Woman, get up! Move to the center!"

Victoria reluctantly went to the center of the room, aware that she was to be taken by everyone. She steeled herself for what to her was the worst thing to happen as memories of Conrad raping and humiliating her as a teenager returned to her mind with fresh horror. Four guards threw her down on the dirt floor and staked her out while other guards watched the rest of the captives to make sure they didn't interfere. Another guard brought over Earl to take her first. She didn't mind him so much as he was an adult. Nor did she mind too much that one of Earl's women was shoved over to John to take while Earl shoved his black cock in her.

As far as she could see, it was another musical beds exercise like they'd been involved in twice before when a woman was perceived by the Lizzars as uncooperative. The bad thing about it was that the men were practically exhausted by the time it ended as it wouldn't end until every man had her. Until that happened, every other woman would be alternating with the other women in her unit as well. For those women who weren't sharing a man, it was non-stop until their man's turn in the center came up. Then they were given to someone else until he finished his turn.

"Change!"

Ty came over and took her while his woman went to John. Victoria barely felt Ty enter her as he lunged back and forth with what he had between his legs while his face clearly showed the strain he was under as he was forced to perform. The guards kept track of the time while they watched intently to see that every man was busy. It was clear to some of the people that the Lizzars enjoyed watching humans go at it until they were too exhausted to do anything other than sleep afterwards.

"Change!"

Victoria watched as a teenage boy was led toward her. All she could see was Conrad as the boy came closer to her. In desperation, she screamed, "I'm already pregnant, damn it!"

The guards stopped. The guard with the boy looked over to his leader for instructions. The Lizzar leader hesitated momentarily, then walked to

the center of the room to where Victoria was staked out.

He hissed as he spoke. "You are pregnant?"

Victoria could only see Conrad taking her if she didn't admit the truth.

"Yes, I'm pregnant! Keep him away from me! Please!"

"Who is responsible?" he hissed.

Victoria pointed at John with a trembling hand.

"Take her away! Send him another woman!" the Lizzar leader ordered.

"I think it would be good for Victoria to have company," Kitten whispered.

"Okay, do what you think best," John whispered back.

"I'm pregnant, too!" Kitten said loudly.

The Lizzar leader turned toward Kitten as she repeated herself. He smiled in the wicked looking leer that Lizzars possessed. "Take her away! Send him two more!"

The three boys stood idle as their girls were taken away and shoved at John. Guards soon came to lead them away, too. John hoped that nothing bad happened to them. Though it wouldn't be his fault, he wouldn't feel well if he later learned they were emasculated to care for the pregnant women or killed.

John immediately got on one of the new girls when his guard pointed to her. As he stroked away, he was glad that Cheryl hadn't admitted she was pregnant. Otherwise, he felt certain that several more girls would have been sent his way as a reward for his success.

When at last John finished the last of his women, he gratefully rolled off her to fall asleep as his exhausted body demanded. Around him and the others, the guards continued to keep watch in the dim electric light.

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The following night, two of Earl's women admitted to being pregnant after becoming sick while trying to eat. Three more girls were taken away from their men and given to him. Ty and two boys soon left with guards while the two pregnant women went another direction with other guards.

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Cheryl became sick the next day and was taken away while more girls were sent to John and their males sent elsewhere under guard. He found himself screwing even longer than before. Before he was finished with all his women, he was nearly asleep from exhaustion.

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Over Commander Zira watched as several warriors slipped through the pitch black darkness carrying condom bombs toward each of the two laser towers. The warriors were covered with laser gel that would refract the laser beam if they were spotted before they reached the towers. With two more towers disabled, Zira knew that his forces would have taken out most of the enemy's primary defenses in his sector.

The night remained still and quiet as the warriors galloped across the plains toward the towers. Only an alert Lizzar sentry could give warning as virtually nothing else remained alive within the zones covered by the lasers. There was no high vegetation left to lure any grazing animals; hence there were no large grass-eaters to lure the predators. Rarely did any of the planet's predators or other beasts dare set foot inside the laser zones. The laser zones had become deserts consisting of only some sparse low-lying vegetation and a few insects. Anything larger was deliberately targeted by the Lizzar gunners.

His warriors out of sight, Zira could only wait for some sign of success. A flash of light from one of many lighters given them by the people from Earth or a laser tower going into operation and then shutting down were two of the possibilities. Otherwise, the battle would be nearly silent and unseen.

"There's a light on the right, sir," Sub-commander Frea said.

"That's one, then. We're halfway successful," Zira said. He kept watching for another sign from the other tower while his warrior cohorts waited eagerly to go on the attack deep within Lizzar territory. He could have taken them into Lizzar territory at a number of locations, but he chose where he was based on the intelligence he had from one of the few centaur warriors who escaped and managed to return home alive. Usually those who escaped were orphans or those without relatives held captive who felt no sense of duty to remain a captive and help care for their own.

Zira knew without a doubt that Coach Weaver was right in his recommendation. All centaurs taken prisoner had to attempt an escape no matter what their individual circumstances. If they did, Zira knew he could easily field another cohort, possibly even two.

"There's the other signal, sir. The second tower is out of operation," Frea said.

"Signal your troops to advance. Send a signal to Commander Hora to

move in. It is time for our offensive," Zira ordered.

Chapter 2

Warden Priscilla Honor stared at the fog that suddenly engulfed the prison. She couldn't see out her window at all. Concerned that some of the more hardened prisoners might try to take advantage, she turned and reached for her phone to order a lock down. The lights went out as she turned and groped for her phone. Upon picking it up, she discovered that the line was dead. In the near darkness of her office, she placed the phone down and groped her way to the door and then to her secretary's desk.

"Who's that?"

"Me, Priscilla."

"Oh, Warden. You startled me. What happened to the lights?"

"We must have a power failure. Is your phone working, Sheila?"

Sheila answered a moment later, "No, ma'am."

"Okay, make your way..."

"Warden! We've got a riot on our hands!" a voice shouted.

"Where?" Priscilla asked.

"We don't know where yet. All the power is dead and the generator hasn't kicked in. We can't lock down the cells automatically."

"Is your radio working?" Priscilla asked.

"Yes, that's how I'm getting my information."

"Order them to manually lock the cells."

The radio blared with static, then a call came over it. "Warden Honor, we have demands. Either see them or someone's going to be hurt."

"Give me your radio. I'll talk to whoever that is. While I stall them, try to get other guards to surround them. Let's isolate this before it spreads," Priscilla ordered.

It took a moment before Sheila lit a match. In the dim light, they could finally briefly see each other to hand off the radio.

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Kelly looked out of her cell at the end of the world. She couldn't believe that the prison ended unexpectedly just two steps away from her cell. She stared at some far off stars as those went by slowly while other objects

came and went at fantastic speeds. Afraid that someone had slipped something to her, she remained where she was and just tried to enjoy the view while wondering how soon she'd be raped or molested in her drugged condition. She knew there were both prisoners and guards who would do either or both to her. Not once did she believe that what she was seeing was real.

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"What do you want? I need to know your demands and to hear my people state that they're alive and unharmed. If you don't do these things, then we have no room for discussion," Priscilla's voice asked over the radio.

"What do you mean we're in..."

"Come in. What were you saying? Who are you talking to?" Priscilla asked.

"What do you mean we're in space? Prisons don't fly, let alone jump up into space. Anyone know what the fuck this gal's been into? Someone get this taken care of so I can get back on this radio with the warden."

"Midge, she's telling the truth! I saw it, too! Bobbi is floating out in space dead at this moment. She tried stepping out of the fog and it killed her. She's all boiled and ruptured. It's really sickening to see anyone look like her."

"You're trying to stop us from taking over this prison. Now shut up and get away from me so I can negotiate with the warden! Go help burn the library!" Midge screamed.

"Midge, I swear we're not! On my mother's grave! I swear it!"

"You don't even know who your mother was, let alone if she's dead! Get out of my hair before you force me to deal with you, Andrea."

"Okay, don't believe me. One thing's certain, we're not going to get anything we want once Honor finds out the situation."

"Get her out of here! Put her in a cell! And get me some more candles! You'd think this prison would have an emergency backup generator!" Midge shouted.

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Priscilla asked, "Who am I talking to? Who's on the other end of this radio? What are your demands?"

Sheila lit a candle to illuminate the room. As she did, she noticed the fog swirling around their feet and getting higher.

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In the industrial-sized laundry room, fog swirled into the darkened room. Inside, it mixed with the bleach still present in wet loads fresh from the washers waiting to be tossed into the dryers. The synthetic clothing disappeared from the piles of wet laundry without anyone noticing. Then the washers popped open when the seals disappeared into vapor. Water flew out in a rush, mixing more chlorine from the bleach water into the fog, enhancing the effect. Plastic bottles of bleach soon dissolved into vapors, further strengthening the overall effect. As the fog crept into other places adjacent to the laundry room, most plastics and synthetics dissolved into vapors.

The inmates inside the laundry room stumbled around into each other in the dark trying to find their way amid the scattered laundry carts and other equipment. The first few who realized they were naked when their synthetic clothes dissolved thought that someone else was responsible, though they couldn't understand how it had been done. They kept their mouths shut because they didn't want to swallow any laundry water or further alert whoever was responsible. Even so, they sputtered on occasion as they slipped and fell in the dark, wet room.

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In the shower room, several inmates felt around blindly in the dark for their clothes. They were unaware that the water had released its chlorine content to mix with the fog that they couldn't see swirling about.

"Who took my underwear?"

"I didn't! I can't find mine, either. My flip flops are missing, too! I was just wearing them! Who took them?"

"I want to know who took my underwear! I'll make someone pay if it's not back immediately."

"Mine are missing too! Maybe the guard took it?"

"So, she wants to play games, huh? Where is she?"

At the doorway, the female guard, Officer Angelica Web, was having troubles of her own. Her first indication was when her badge fell from her to the floor as her synthetic uniform dissolved leaving her with only her gun belt remaining while her shoes slowly fell apart. Aware that something was desperately wrong, Angelica exited quicky, slammed the door shut, and locked it.

"What kind of trick is she up to?"

One woman felt her way around in the dark, her cotton towel clutched around her. Her bare foot touched on something metal with an odd shape. She bent down carefully and picked it up. A moment later, she said, "I just found a badge!"

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"Hey! How'd you do that?"

Midge asked, "What?" as she turned toward the voice. She stared at the female officer wearing only her belt and shoes that were falling apart.

"I asked how she took her clothes off with me holding her."

"You were holding her? No way! You're pulling something fast on me. Where's your fuckin' clothes?" Midge demanded.

"I don't know. They were on me just a moment ago. Now they're gone. I thought one of you slipped me something," the officer replied.

"My clothes are gone!" another woman yelled.

"Mine, too!"

"What's going on here?" Midge hollered while feeling of herself.

"Maybe it's some super fast dude taking them off us!"

"Shut up! There ain't no such things as a super fast dude!" Midge said.

"Midge! Your radio! It's...it's"

Midge stared at the radio as it fell apart into metal components in her hand. The bare wires quickly shorted out rendering the radio even more useless.

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"They must have damaged their radio or they're only listening. We'll have to talk to them somehow before they hurt someone. Sheila, is everyone on alert yet?" Priscilla asked.

"I don't know. Doesn't the fog appear strange to you? I mean, different from before?" Sheila answered.

"I don't have time to worry about the fog, except that it's keeping us from reacting properly. See to it that everyone is on alert. While you're at it, find out what happened to the emergency generator."

Sheila lit a second candle. She walked off into the fog and screamed before hurrying back toward Priscilla.

Priscilla stared at Sheila as she returned fully naked. "What the hell?" she blurted out before she realized that her own clothing was disappearing

from her body.

"Not you, too!" Sheila exclaimed as Warden Honor was quickly rendered naked.

"Something's really wrong!" Priscilla managed to blurt out just before her radio fell apart in her hands. "Oh my god, the radio! We can't talk to anyone!"

"What about our clothes! We can't go out like this!"

"There's a coat in my office. You can wear that."

Sheila went into the office amid the fog. She looked in vain for the coat only to find some metal buttons with her bare feet. "Oh no! Your coat is gone, too. All that's left is buttons."

Priscilla glanced at Sheila's desk in horror. When Sheila returned, she followed Priscilla's line of sight and looked at the remains on her desk. Her plastic drink cup was gone leaving liquid spilled all over. The phone remained only as bare metal parts in a small pile.

"Get hold of all the guards. Tell them we're not going in at all. Have them gather here." Priscilla ordered.

"What about my clothes? I can't walk out there like this."

"Forget about clothes. Whatever is destroying them is probably making everyone naked right now. Just do what I ordered. Now!"

As Sheila left carrying her candle, Priscilla returned to her office, found her keys, and unlocked a desk drawer. She took out her handgun and a box of shells for it. Without hurrying, she loaded it and held onto the box of shells so she could reload if it became necessary. Before she managed five steps away from her desk, the plastic box disappeared from her hand leaving only loose bullets in her clenched fist. A few bullets fell from her hand to scatter about on the floor. Ignoring them, she held onto what she had and continued toward the doorway. As she walked, she could feel the plastic grip of her gun dissolving inside her palm leaving her holding the bare metal frame of the handle. She muttered, "Whatever in hell is happening, we're really in for it this time."

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Officer Jim Drake hurried as best he could with his shotgun at the ready while constantly checking his holstered gun to be sure it was still with him. He wasn't sure how it happened that his clothing and shoes either disappeared or fell apart. However, he was sure it had something to do with why part of the prison was missing and what he saw from the edge of

what was left. He found the front door to the administrative portion of the main building and entered it amid the fog that had been all around him while he was outside. The fog was similarly flowing about inside the building as light from the outside filtered dimly in through the open door. Cautiously, he made his way toward the Warden's office. He spotted the candlelight burning dimly in the fog and asked, "Is anyone there?"

"Who's there? This is Warden Honor."

"Officer Drake, Warden. I came to report something important. I won't come any closer since my clothes are missing."

"That's nothing new. So are mine. Is that all you have to report?"

"No, Warden. We're in space. Part of the outer wall and the back part of the building is missing. It don't seem possible, but I saw it with my own eyes."

"We're missing part of the outer wall?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes, Warden. I climbed down and looked carefully. The back wall and one tower on the east side is missing all the way down to the ground. I would have called, but my radio fell apart and nothing up there worked."

"Okay, I've already ordered all personnel to report here. Just remain here and guard the corridor. Don't let anyone in who you or another officer doesn't recognize. Wait a minute! You said we're in space? How's that possible?"

"I don't know, but I saw planets and such just streaking by. It's really weird seeing that, too."

Priscilla started to sit down, then remembered the springs that she'd already sat on once hadn't felt that good under her bare bottom. "I'm going to shove this stuff off the desk so I can sit down. Don't bother looking for a chair. Seems like the material on those is gone, too. As a man, those springs might be even more dangerous for you than me to sit on. As best as I know, the phones are shot to hell along with anything else made of plastic."

She shoved off most of the desktop clutter with a sweep of her arm. It clattered onto the carpeted floor that no longer fell fully carpeted to her. It was as if only part of the backing remained. "One more thing. We've got an officer probably being held by the inmates. They called on her radio before we lost contact. I can only assume that they're experiencing the same problems we have here. So, we're in space?"

"Yes, Warden. I don't use drugs, either," Jim replied.

"After what's happened already, I believe you. I'm not questioning whether you use anything or not. All I know is that we have a severe

problem. We have a few hundred inmates on the loose and we're trying to draw our forces in just so we can survive. As of now, I'm authorizing the use of deadly force on any inmates who oppose us. If we're really in space, I don't want them in control."

"We're really in space, Warden."

"I guess I sound skeptical. Who's there?"

Jim pointed his shotgun at the sound of approaching footsteps and a faint light. He ordered firmly, "Halt! Who's there?"

"Sheila Pound. I'm the secretary."

Priscilla said, "That's Sheila's voice. You can let her come in. How'd you do, Sheila?"

Sheila entered with her candle, stopping briefly to stare at Jim who held his shotgun pointed down the hallway while wearing only his gun belt. Sheila said, "I found some officers and told them what you said. They're manually locking down what they can. Then they'll report here after spreading the word."

"How are they doing? Any of them naked?" Priscilla asked.

"Yes, ma'am. They're all naked except for their belts and a couple of undershirts. I asked about those. They told me those were made of cotton," Sheila answered.

"Makes sense. Everything else is synthetic. We might have to wear prison garb at this rate, though most of that's synthetic as well," Priscilla said.

"Are you going to tell her?" Jim asked.

"I was planning on waiting until more people are here."

"Tell me what?" asked Sheila.

"Officer Drake informs me that we're in space somehow. Right now, we're completely on our own so we better stick together or the inmates will take over."

"Space? Outer space? You're joking," Sheila exclaimed.

"No, we're not joking. Something ripped us up from the face of the Earth. It's pulling us through space right now according to Officer Drake," Priscilla replied.

"Conway! That's probably what happened to Conway!" Sheila exclaimed. "They tried to claim it was a sinkhole that the town was swallowed into after the news had already shown pictures of the thirty-foot deep hole left behind and talked to witnesses. They covered it up, but I know better! We're going to where Conway went!"

"Conway? Do you really think this is related to that?" Priscilla asked. "I

know the news reports changed after the first day, but that happens all the time.”

“It sounds more reasonable right now to believe they got pulled into space, too,” Jim said. “Halt! Who's there?”

“Officer Pete Lion. Is it okay to come in naked? I don't want to alarm the Warden or her secretary.”

“We're all naked, Officer Lion. Just come in and find a place to sit while we gather our strength and intelligence. What post were you on?” Priscilla said.

“Northwest tower. One moment we had a back wall, the next thing we knew, the fog dropped down on us. The we discovered that the back wall was gone. We couldn't see what happened to the convicts in the yard back there. Not until we moved close enough to the edge of what was missing and could see out of the fog. We must have left close to a hundred inmates floating about in space. Dude, uh, Officer Dudley got sick. Almost made me sick, too.”

“Close to a hundred? Well, that lessens the odds considerably against us. That could put the number down to three hundred. Is Officer Dudley coming here?” Priscilla asked.

“He's watching the yard while I report. He didn't want to report because he smells bad, Warden Honor,” Pete answered.

“Go tell him to report here. We can't afford to be cut off from each other, no matter what we smell or look like. My orders are to use deadly force on any inmates who oppose you,” Priscilla ordered.

“Yes, ma'am. I'll be back soon. With Officer Dudley.”

“Now it seems that we have confirmation that we're in space. Officer Drake, as soon as someone else gets here, you and I are going to the armory and break out riot weapons. I want us armed well enough to hold off every inmate who dares show her face in here with so much as a shiv or club. I don't want to leave Sheila alone.”

“Seeing as we lost part of the building, we could be facing a lot less than three hundred,” Jim said.

“True, but until we can get ourselves together and probe in force, we'll have to assume the worst. We don't know how many officers we still have,” Priscilla said.

• • •

Midge hollered as she tried to regain control over her followers. One

woman came at her unexpectedly out of the fog. Reacting quickly, Midge stabbed her, ripping upwards from her navel to her sternum. The woman fell to the floor while blood spurted out. "I said for everyone to shut up! I can't think!"

• • •

Officer Angelica Web held her nightstick at the ready as she approached the next gate. She constantly expected inmates to rush out at any moment to grab her. So far, most of them hadn't realized that their cells weren't locked. Angelica reached the gate, called out, and received no response. She tried the gate and found that it opened. She quickly went through and shut it behind her. Protecting her back, she hurried to the manual control and locked it so none of the inmates could follow her. From there, she softly padded down the next corridor in her bare feet and hoped that none of its inmates were already out.

• • •

"Glad to see you, pardon the pun. Drake, come with me while Lion and Dudley hold the fort. Be sure you recognize anyone you let enter," Priscilla said.

Drake went over to stand beside Warden Honor. He couldn't help but notice her attributes as she held the candle in one hand and her revolver in the other. He stared into her face to notice that she was similarly staring at him. He glanced down sheepishly already aware that he had a sincere boner sticking out. He followed her a moment later as she led the way to the armory.

Away from the others, she asked, "Do you find me attractive?"

"Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly," she replied.

"Yes, Warden, I do. Hope I'm not offending you."

"I guess it can't be helped. Neither of us set up this situation but we're stuck with it nonetheless. Just keep that to yourself for now, though. Your penis, that is."

"I wasn't planning on using it."

• • •

Angelica paused as she heard footsteps in front of her. Afraid that she might be encountering inmates, possibly armed, she remained quiet with

her nightstick at the ready.

The candle approached. Angelica sighed with relief as she first recognized the warden approaching with a man by her side. Angelica didn't think it strange at all that they were both naked save for his gun belt.

Priscilla stopped upon seeing Officer Web standing quietly in front of her. The sudden shock of encountering someone with a club raised to strike almost caused her to fire her revolver.

"Officer Web, Warden. What are your orders?" Angelica asked.

Priscilla ordered, "Fall in with us. We're going to the armory. If any inmates oppose us, I've authorized the use of deadly force. Are you aware that we're in space?"

"Space, Warden?" Angelica asked.

"We're really in space. We think this is what happened to Conway some time back," Jim said.

Angelica brushed up against Jim as she took up a position behind the warden. Because the candlelight was blocked, she couldn't see the effect she had on him.

They soon reached the armory which Priscilla unlocked. Priscilla entered quickly and checked on what was intact. She wasn't at all surprised to find the bullet-resistant body armor was useless. Nor was she shocked to discover that the shotgun shells were similarly useless. "Officer Drake, you better check your shotgun. Two to one, you don't have any intact shells left in it to fire."

Drake pumped the action on his shotgun to suddenly hear pellets rolling about inside and cause a jam. Some pellets fell from the gun as he swore and drew his 9mm handgun.

"Take what you can carry. Leave the shotgun here. We'll hope that the rifle and handgun ammunition are still okay. I know that mine is. Officer Web, remain here and don't let anyone in who isn't an officer on our side. If you have a hostage confrontation, then we're going to have to cut our losses or we'll all die. I'm not dealing with anyone for any hostages. Not under these circumstances. I'll only send male officers here to get more weapons. That should make it easier to identify someone sent by me. Any other officers show up, have them report to me first. Don't give them any weapons if you suspect that inmates are nearby. You better keep two pistols handy so they can't overpower you," Priscilla ordered.

"Yes ma'am."

"Drake, carry as many gun belts with pistols and ammo as you can. I'll back you up," Priscilla ordered.

"Wouldn't it be better if I backed you up?" Jim asked.

"I know perfectly well how to use a firearm. I'll provide the backup," Priscilla said.

• • •

Midge walked to the edge of the floor and stared out of the fog at space. She momentarily watched planets and space debris pass by before stepping back from the edge. "I wonder if it's really dangerous to leave this fog? Bring that copper over here. We're going to find out!"

"No, Midge! That's murder!"

The female officer struggled to free herself, relaxing only when she felt the point of a shiv against her throat.

"So what if it's murder? We're already in prison and no one's going to know who did what. Besides, if we're in space, they're sure as hell not going to send anyone out here for us," Midge shouted.

"She could be used for bargaining power. The other cops still have the guns."

Midge said, "Yeah, you're right about that," before shoving another inmate beside her out into space.

• • •

"Who's there?" Angelica asked.

"Officers Dudley and Lion. We were sent by the Warden to get more guns and ammo."

"Advance so I can see you."

"She wants to see us? First time I ever had a woman ask to see me while I'm stark naked," Dude said.

"Shut up. She just wants to be sure we're not hostages," Pete said.

"I know that. Just joking to lighten the situation," Dude said.

"How many of us are there now?" Angelica asked.

"Counting you and us, twelve," Pete said.

"And probably only three hundred inmates," said Dude.

Angelica looked at the two men who held their revolvers at the ready. Convinced that they weren't hostages, she let them past her into the armory while she kept watch. A few minutes later, both men carried out more rifles and ammo with them.

"You better bring an assault rifle with you when the armory is shut down, Officer Web. We don't want anyone unprepared," Pete said.

"I can't leave until the Warden gives me further instructions," she replied. She watched the two officers disappear completely into the fog only three feet away from her.

• • •

"Damn, but she has a nice pussy," Pete whispered

"You noticed, too? You realize that we could all have harems with close to sixty women each?" Dude asked.

"Yeah, and everyone of them eager to cut our balls off and feed them to us before they dice up the rest of our bodies. No thanks. If it comes down to it, I'll stick with the female officers since they still outnumber us and can be trusted more."

"Yeah, two women apiece isn't bad, either."

"Long as I don't wind up with the Warden. Something tells me she's not an easy woman to live with."

• • •

"Okay, we have some bargaining power. Since the only way for us to talk to anyone is to meet them face to face, we'd better get going. Bring her along and take off her gun belt. Let's make it harder for them to recognize her as a cop," Midge said.

One of the women removed the officer's belt.

Midge said, "Yeah, this ought to keep them guessing about who's who," as she took the belt and wrapped it around her waist.

• • •

Jim approached the armory. Beside him, three more officers walked silently with their guns at the ready. He called out softly, "Officer Drake here."

"Advance to be recognized," Angelica said.

"I have three other officers with me. All male," Jim said.

"Okay, advance slowly. Let me see that you're alone and not held as hostages."

• • •

Midge came up against the locked gate. She rattled it in frustration and swore. To further vent her frustration, she backhanded the female cop. "I never said I wouldn't beat on her some," Midge said.

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"Warden Honor wants you to bring along what you can carry and lock the armory. Then return with us to report back," Jim said.

Angelica said, "I'm ready," as she picked up a metal box of ammo and an assault rifle. She stepped out of the armory and slammed the door shut before locking it.

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"Midge, we've found a gate they missed!"

"Now we're talkin'!" Midge exclaimed.

• • •

"Okay, it's the twelve of us against all of them. They probably have one officer as a hostage. I'm not surrendering to save one person. Under our current circumstances, they'd only kill us all since there's no reason for them to expect any retaliation from the authorities. We're the only authority left, so we have to be firm and not back down. You all are already aware that I've authorized the use of deadly force. There aren't going to be any suspensions or personnel reviews if any of you get jumpy and fire on an inmate. The way I see it, we're fighting for our very lives now," Priscilla said.

"I smell smoke," Angelica said.

"Okay, that means they're burning the prison. Our best bet is to get outside in the yard and keep bunched up together. If that means we have to stand cheek to cheek, then that's what we'll do to keep the inmates from taking us. Gentlemen, I want you all to bring up the rear. You're the only people here who the rest of us can tell apart from the inmates immediately at a glance. Everyone is to stick with someone else. We'll proceed in twos toward the courtyard. Follow me," Priscilla said.

• • •

"Burn all the papers! Screw the bastards! It'll take them months to straighten out this mess!" Midge shouted.

A woman asked, "But we're in space! What's it going to matter?"

"Shut up! In fact, I have something for you to do. Get your ass down to the infirmary and off those AIDS patients. We don't need them around!" Midge yelled.

"But I've never killed..."

"Just fuckin' do it! That or you'll be one of them!" Midge screamed.

"Midge! C Block is stirrin' up trouble! They're beatin' on our people!"

"Oh, they are? Well, we're in charge now and I've got something to say about that. Lead us to them!" Midge shouted.

• • •

"This isn't as good an idea as I thought. We can't see three feet in front of our noses out here," Priscilla said.

"It was the same way inside. Maybe we should get our backs against the wall," Jim said.

"Right, two male officers on each end. Everyone else stay in between them. Don't leave the wall for anything without telling the rest of us. Anyone approaches us, blast them," Priscilla ordered.

• • •

Midge stabbed the black woman without mercy, ripping her throat with her shiv while her knee hit the woman in the gut. Another woman appeared out of the fog. Midge stared at her for a moment before she realized they were on the same side.

"Get back in the fight!" Midge shouted.

• • •

"They're killing each other in there, Warden," Sheila said.

"I know that, but there's nothing we can do about it. It's sad to say, but the fewer of them left when it's over can only be good news for us. Otherwise, I'm not sure we have enough ammunition among us to kill them all if they try to take us," Priscilla replied.

Sheila asked, "Kill? We're going to kill?"

"Only those who attack us. Otherwise, we'll let them be," Priscilla answered.

"Heads up. I think some of them are in the courtyard now," Jim said.

• • •

Midge ignored the shank in her arm and reached out with her head toward the other woman's neck. She gripped the woman with her teeth and ripped through her flesh. The woman put a hand to her neck to stop the bleeding. Midge pulled the shank from her arm and stabbed at the woman's

face. She left the shank sticking out of the other woman's right eye. The woman staggered, then fell into the fog out of sight. Seeking another enemy, Midge pressed onward in the fog, unaware of where she was.

Midge stumbled down one step, then caught her balance. She felt around as she realized she was on a set of steps. Slowly, she made her way down while the fog continued to hang low over everything.

A woman came out of the fog at her. Midge slashed with her shiv, slicing the woman on the arm before she disappeared into the fog. Midge turned around several times looking for her assailant.

Almost without warning, the fog lifted as quickly as it fell on the prison.

"The fog's lifting," Priscilla said.

"I hope this doesn't mean we're going to die in space," Jim said.

"Quiet everyone. Keep your eyes and ears alert. This is our change to get everyone back in their cells," Priscilla said.

Midge stared around her for more enemies even as the fog dissipated around her. She didn't notice the blood clinging to her bare skin as she stood ready to do battle with the gang from C Block.

Angelica spoke quietly to avoid drawing attention. "That's Midge, one of the B Block ringleaders."

"Then keep her in your sights. Without her, their resistance will probably crumble," Priscilla said.

Another black woman charged at Midge. Both women didn't care that the other was naked. They only wanted each other dead. Midge slashed at the woman while receiving a cut on her shoulder.

"I recognize the other one, too. That's Naomi. She's a biggie in C Block," Angelica said.

"We'll let them finish, then send them back to the cells," Priscilla said.

Naomi kicked out at Midge, connecting with the woman's mid-section. Midge fell on her back. Naomi leaped at her without fear. Midge tried to roll out of the way without making it. Naomi drove her shank deep into the side of Midge's head. Unable to remove it, Naomi took the shiv from Midge's lifeless hand and looked around for someone else to attack as she stood up.

"This is Warden Honor! Go back to your cells now or I will order my officers to fire on you!" Priscilla shouted.

Naomi and other women in the yard turned in the warden's direction. "Say what?"

"This is your final warning. Return to your cells or we'll open fire! You have until a count of three. One...two...three...Fire!"

Naomi ran as the bullets flew at her. She hobbled into the prison building before she could be hit a second time. Two other women didn't fare as well. Others had scrambled up the steps before the warden ordered her officers to fire. Naomi yelled back out the door, "Bitch!"

"Well, what now?" Officer Drake asked.

"Right now, we wait for the smoke to clear before we return inside. Now that we can see what we're doing, let's check out the yard," Priscilla said.

"Our cars don't have any tires!" Sheila said.

Priscilla glanced over at the cars outside the gate in the administrative parking lot. At the same time, she saw something more sinister than the inmates. "We've got more trouble. I think they're responsible for why all this happened."

Other officers glanced out at the parking lot in time to see past the edge where lizard-skinned people wearing armor plates over their chests stood with swords and spears.

"Should we head for the tower, Warden?" Jim asked.

"What good would it do?" Priscilla asked.

"We'll have a better view of what the situation facing us is. We'll also be out of spear range, I hope," he answered.

A spear clanged against the gate.

Deciding quickly, Priscilla said, "Yes, the tower!"

Priscilla and the others quickly ran for an access door. Jim unlocked it before they all went inside and climbed up to the tower where it would be safer. From the tower they looked down at the prison, seeing that much of it was missing.

"It appears that we might have only about a hundred inmates left. I think we can handle them," Priscilla said.

"What about those lizardpeople? There's an awful lot of them. They seem to have us surrounded."

Some spears clanked against the walls beneath the tower. Sheila jumped with a yelp when one sounded near.

"Better keep calm, Sheila. They can't reach us here," Priscilla said.

"Maybe not, but they can throw their spears up here once they get closer," Sheila said.

"Then we'll just keep our heads down," Jim said.

"They're climbing up to the parking lot," Angelica said.

"They're climbing into the back exercise yard, too," Pete said.

"We're surrounded! We'll be killed!" Sheila exclaimed.

Sounds of fighting came from inside the prison. Screams and clanking

metal could be heard as a new battle began between the inmates and the lizard people.

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Commander Haro looked at the abandoned mining camp in disgust. All the efforts his people went through were for nothing as there was no one to rescue.

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"The fighting's over inside. I don't hear anything more," Jim said.

"Are all the inmates dead?" Sheila asked.

"Probably," he answered.

"We're safe for the time being. They can't get in the tower and we have guns, as well," Priscilla said.

Sheila asked, "What about food and water? We'll have to have those."

"Well, we'll just have to go after those when we need them. If the lizards give us any trouble, then we'll shoot them. It's perfectly clear to me that they're not friendly bastards," Jim said.

"The inmates aren't all dead. The lizard people captured some of them. They're forcing them to go somewhere," Pete said.

Everyone turned to look just over the edge of the observation tower opening at the sight of several dozen women forced to leave at sword and spear point. A few wounded women were helped by others to walk.

"I wonder if they're any better off that way," Priscilla said.

"Well, they're alive and we're still surrounded," Sheila said.

"What about the armored personnel carrier? It's big enough to carry all of us," Angelica suggested.

"I'm qualified to drive it. Just say the word, Warden," Dude said.

"I don't see any choice but to go for it. Since we don't have to worry about the inmates anymore, we'll split up into two groups. One goes for the vehicle. The other goes for food and water in the prison," Priscilla said.

"Who's going where?" Sheila asked.

"Officers Dudley and Web, Sheila, and I will go for the vehicle. The rest are to head for the kitchen and grab whatever they can carry. We'll drive the vehicle right up the steps so you won't be exposed..." she said, only to be interrupted by laughter from most of the group, "...to spears when you come out."

• • •

Priscilla waited at the doorway as Officer Dudley opened it. She held her handgun at the ready while a rifle remained strapped over her shoulder. Beside her, Sheila held another handgun with trembling hands. "Don't point that at anyone until you have to. I don't like nervous people handling guns," Priscilla said.

"I'm ready. How about you, Dude?" Angelica asked.

He answered, "Ready as I'm going to be. Ready, set, go!"

He and Angelica sprinted out the open door of the tower while Priscilla stood watching for any attempts by the lizard people to attack them. Behind her and Sheila, the rest of the group waited for their turn to run for the prison building.

Dude shouted, "In position!"

"Our turn, Sheila. Just stay by me and watch where you point your weapon," Priscilla said.

"Yes, Warden."

Priscilla said, "Now!" and took off running from the doorway.

Sheila ran after her, surprised at the sudden start without any warning. They ran alongside the prison wall for almost fifty yards before they reached the main gate. As soon as they reached it, they took cover at the corner of the gate where the stones stuck out slightly.

As Sheila reached the position, Priscilla shouted, "In position!"

"Okay, we've got you guys covered from this angle! Make for the prison now!" Dude shouted.

From the tower, the remaining eight officers ran from the doorway toward the main building. They reached the steps leading up to it and bounded up, taking those two and three at a time until they were inside the building.

"Okay, they're in! Our turn to move! Ready when you are, Officer Dudley," Priscilla said.

"Why not call me Dude like everyone else? We're ready!"

"Okay, go!" Priscilla put her arm out as Sheila began to leave the position. Priscilla said, "Not us, them."

Dude called out, "In position!"

Sheila said, "Give me more warning this time."

Priscilla shouted, "Ready, set, go!" and began running with Sheila hot on her heels.

Dude and Angelica spotted the lizard people moving in. Without hesitation, they fired warning shots.

Sheila shouted, "Shit!"

"What's wrong?" Priscilla asked.

"I just pissed on myself!" she answered.

"Don't worry about that," Priscilla replied as they kept running past where Dude and Angelica kept watch on the lizard people. Priscilla pulled up next to the corner of the building housing the armored personnel carrier. Sheila huffed to a stop beside her. Priscilla shouted, "Ready when you are!"

Dude shouted, "This time we go all the way! Ready, set, go!"

He and Angelica ran from their defensive position toward the building. He fired twice at a lizard person who tried to throw a spear at him. One shot clanged off the chest armor. The second bullet hit the lizard person in the leg.

Priscilla fired another shot at the same lizard person and whirled about as she heard Sheila mumbling. Quickly, Priscilla snapped off three more shots at lizard people coming from the other side of the building. She hit one in the head, dropping him dead in front of the other two. Her other two shots narrowly missed hitting either of the other lizard people. Sheila finally pointed her handgun in the right direction, jerked the trigger, and emptied her handgun at the enemy. One of them fell dead and another ran off holding his arm.

"Reload, Sheila, while I keep you covered," Priscilla said.

Sheila fumbled with her handgun to take the magazine out and feed another into it.

Dude shouted, "Shooting the lock!"

Two shots sounded before he shouted, "We're in! Hurry up around the corner while we cover you!"

"Get going, Sheila. You can reload inside the vehicle," Priscilla ordered.

Sheila ran with her hands full around the corner toward the open door where Dude and Angelica stood ready to repel the enemy.

Dude shouted, "Inside, Sheila! Come on, Warden!"

Priscilla shouted, "Coming!" as she fired one more shot at another lizard person before she bolted from her position to join the others. As she reached the doorway to take Dude's place, he ran inside to get the vehicle started. He took Sheila by the elbow and rushed her to the rear of the vehicle.

Opening the hatch, he said, "Get in first!"

Sheila stepped inside the vehicle as Dude shouted, "Okay, next!"

"Go ahead, Warden," Angelica said.

Priscilla said, "No, we'll go together. Now!"

Both women left the door and ran inside the vehicle. They reached the back and clambered into the hatchway closely followed by Dude who closed and latched it. He made his way forward while they took seats.

Dude said, "I don't guess we're too concerned about the door. I'm going to just plow through it."

"Can he do that in this?" Sheila asked.

"Be quiet now. Reload your weapon and holster it. We're a whole lot safer now than we used to be. Go ahead and do it, Dude," Priscilla said.

Dude turned the engine over and idled it for a moment as he checked the gauges. Satisfied with what he saw, he put the vehicle into gear and drove forward, smashing through the door and into two surprised lizard people. One clung to the front of the vehicle as Dude turned toward the prison gate. He picked up speed and charged at it while the lizard person continued to hang on until it was too late.

Dude said, "Oh, that must hurt!" after the vehicle slammed into the gate and tore through while nearly slicing the lizard person into French fry lengths by driving his body into the bars. Moments later, the bars and the dead lizard person fell beneath the vehicle. Dude drove straight for the steps and shouted, "Hang on! It gets rough in a moment!" just before the APC climbed up the steps to the front doors. He spun the treads in opposite directions as he reached the top, performing a turn that left the vehicle at the top and facing back toward the gates. "Okay, Angelica, you watch the back. I'll take the turret."

As Angelica opened the hatch, the sound of gunfire came from inside the building. She watched anxiously for the others to return with food and water. Moments later, she heard Dude firing his pistol from the turret. As well, more shots came from inside the building. Soon, the shots from inside were closer. The other officers came running out, carrying what food and beverages they could find. Officer Sasha Deal clutched her arm to stem the bleeding from a wound.

She hollered, "They're still inside and not afraid of our guns in the least!"

Jim shouted, "Too many of them in there to hold off for long. We grabbed what we could."

"Get in! We're leaving while we can!" Priscilla ordered.

The officers passed by Angelica into the APC. Angelica stepped inside and clanged the hatch closed. Dude immediately drove down the steps as soon as Angelica said it was latched. Angelica fell backward onto Pete's lap. The APC bounced as it hit the bottom step. Angelica said, "Oh, that

was a hard one."

Sheila asked, "Where are we going?"

Priscilla answered, "Anywhere that's safer than the prison. Dude! Just keep going straight. Don't stop for anything."

"Right, Warden!" Dude replied.

Dude drove until he reached the edge where he stopped. He asked, "Anyone see a way down?"

"Over there! The edge is collapsed over there!" Jim said.

"Right! Hang on everyone, this next one is going to be even rougher!" Dude said.

The APC nearly bounced off a rock as it went over the edge where the ground had collapsed. Dude barely kept it righted. He continued on down until the APC was on the surface of the new world. Then he drove directly away from the prison on its island of Earth.

"Warden, since we can't leave this world, don't you think we should consider our options and status?" Jim asked.

"Options and status?" asked Priscilla.

"Yes, our options and status. For one thing, it's clear that we're not on Earth anymore. We're not exactly getting paid to do any of this. As well, no one on Earth even knows where we are, let alone how to come get us. Therefore, we're on our own and we better get together on some ground rules for our survival. It's not like we're not adults, but we're in a situation we couldn't have prepared for."

"He's right. We're without clothes and don't know where we're going. All we have are our weapons and some food and water. I think we need to agree on how we're going to behave," Angelica said.

Priscilla asked, "Just what are you getting at, Officer Drake? Are you suggesting that we should all get together in small groups, two women to each man and just shack up while we see about surviving?"

"Warden, you aren't even close to what I'm suggesting. True, we do need to consider how we're going to conduct ourselves socially, which you can take to include sexually, as well. If you want two women to each man, I'll go along with you. However, that's not what I was suggesting. What I'm talking about is a division of labor and responsibilities. You might have been the warden of the prison on Earth. However, we're not on Earth. Being a warden here doesn't guarantee survival. What guarantees survival is the ability to fight and lead. I'm not saying you don't have those qualities, either. However, you haven't given us any direction so far on what we're going to do. Since you're still in charge, wouldn't it make sense for you to

start speaking your mind and sharing with us what we're going to do next? In other words, start doling out some responsibilities to us before we get too damn far from the prison. At least, it's familiar," Jim said.

"I guess I see where you're aiming. Dude! Are we far enough away from those lizards to stop?" Priscilla asked.

"I've outdistanced them, if that's what you mean. Whoa! Hang on to your seats! We've got more trouble and I mean with a capital T. I think they've got a fuckin' laser!"

Dude spun the APC off course and then back again as he hit top speed while dodging the destructive beam. He hollered, "Everyone hit the deck!"

The deck became a pile of naked flesh as everyone ducked as low as possible in response to Dude's warning. Then the APC slowly came to rest.

"Damn it! Dude's dead. We've got to knock out that laser or we're all dead. Hand me a rifle!" Jim exclaimed.

"I'll go out the rear hatch. You hit them from the turret," Pete shouted.

"On the count of three! One...two...three!" Jim said.

Jim popped open the turret as Pete went out the rear hatch. Jim fired at the laser tower with his assault rifle on full automatic while the beam moved toward him. Pete's shots centered on the tower aperture at the same time. The beam went out just before it was about to slice Jim in half. Jim glanced around at the terrain, then dropped back inside the APC.

Pete stepped back inside the vehicle as the people inside got back into their seats after untangling themselves. He was about to close the hatch when Jim said, "Not just yet. We'll have to leave Dude here."

"Unfortunately, Officer Drake's right. Keep his weapons and belt. Pass his body out the back and leave it," Priscilla ordered.

Sheila asked, "Without burying him?"

Priscilla asked, "How are we going to bury him? Besides, that tower might have replacements parts for that laser. We'd look real silly dying over a grave."

"This is going to be messy, but it can't be helped. Mitch, give us a hand," Jim said.

The three remaining male officers carried Dude's body to the rear of the vehicle and dropped it out the hatch. Pete shut the hatch while Jim went forward.

"You driving, Officer Drake?" Priscilla asked.

He answered, "I guess I am for now. I'd appreciate it if you'd assign some tasks real soon such as someone to act as shotgun in case we encounter anymore of those laser positions."

"Now I understand what you were talking about. Officer Web, take the turret position and stand watch with a rifle while Officer Drake drives."

"One more thing. I think it would be easier on all of us if we dispense with the officer business. I don't look like an officer any longer and I sure don't feel much like one, either. You can all call me Jim or Drake."

"Might as well include me in on that idea. Aside from defending us, I don't intend to go riding around trying to right every wrong I see. I'm sure as hell not the nude avenger," Pete said.

"That has kind of a ring to it. The nude avengers," Angelica said.

Jim engaged the gears of the APC and slowly drove it along the terrain as he became more familiar with the vehicle and discovered how much of it still worked. "I think we got off lucky on what those lizards hit with their laser."

"Riding along in their armored avenger-mobile, the nude avengers look for anyone wearing clothes so they can steal them," Mitch said.

"Comforting the poor and goosing evil," said Sasha.

"Goosing?" asked Angelica.

"Well, it was almost funny. I didn't know what else to say to lighten up the situation," Sasha replied.

"Enough of that now. Jim's right. I need to set some priorities. We'll have to take turns driving and keeping watch. One hour shifts. Since you can't drive, Sheila, you'll pull guard like everyone else," Priscilla said.

"But I'm a civilian!" Sheila protested.

"You'll be a pedestrian civilian if you're not willing to pull your share of the load. We're in this together or you can get out now and go your own way," Priscilla replied.

"You want me to stop to let her out?" Jim asked.

"Not yet. Let her decide first what it's going to be," Priscilla answered.

"Alone on foot? No thanks. I guess I can pull guard if someone tells me how."

"I'll explain it. There's nothing to it really," Pete said.

• • •

Kelly stared blankly at the lizard people who forced her and the others to walk away from the prison. She still couldn't believe what had happened to her. It seemed impossible that her life could become any worse. However, she was naked and on a forced march at the hands of strange captors whose intent she didn't know. As she stared around at the other

women, she realized that none of them had so much as a stitch left among them. She shuddered to think that one of the other women might try to molest her even while their captors herded them along. She noticed Andrea was alive, remembering how nice she was in prison. Andrea hadn't tried to take advantage of her or anyone else. If anything, Kelly was certain that Andrea shouldn't have been in prison since Kelly felt sure that Andrea was innocent. Kelly wished she could make the same claim, but she knew she was guilty. She had, after all, knowingly carried drugs for her boyfriend.

• • •

"Hate to say it, but we're going to have another problem in a few more hours," Jim said.

"What problem?" Priscilla asked.

"We're going to run out of fuel eventually. Right now, I'd guess we have maybe six hours before we're empty. If I drive slower, we can stretch that out some," he answered.

"Are we sufficiently far enough away from those lizards?" Priscilla asked.

Jim asked, "Angelica, anyone still behind us?" while nudging her thigh.

Angelica glanced down, then asked, "What?"

"Is there anyone directly behind us that you can see?" he asked.

"No, we've left them far behind," she replied.

"I heard her. Go ahead and slow down. We'll conserve fuel for now. Maybe then we can hear without shouting half the time," Priscilla said.

• • •

Mitch turned on the headlights as darkness fell over the terrain. Traveling even slower than during the day, they had all opted to eat while the APC was moving instead of stopping. Their only stops were to change drivers. During the changes, everyone had two minutes to relieve themselves next to the vehicle and hurry back inside to their positions.

Before they ate what was their supper meal, the group went through what little they had and divided it into rations they hoped would last them three days. After that, they knew they'd be without food. It wouldn't be long before water would be the critical resource they'd be doing without.

"There's a forest up ahead. Might be a good idea to hold up there until daylight," Mitch said.

"I guess we all need some sleep. Go ahead and stop beside the forest.

At least, we won't be too visible," Priscilla said.

• • •

Kelly slept while the lizard people stood round the camp. She noticed that some of them seemed sexually aroused. She hoped that they wouldn't be rapists. Then again, she knew there was little she or anyone else could do to stop them.

Andrea crept over beside her. She whispered, "I'm going to make a break for it tonight, but I need your help."

"How? There's too many of them and they're all armed."

"I thought of a way. This sand we're on is perfect for what I have in mind. I'm going to dig into it some. Then I want you to cover me with sand so only my nose is open. When everyone else leaves in the morning, I'll wait until I don't hear anyone. Then I'll sit up and make my way back."

"Alone?" Kelly asked.

"I don't have any other choices. I either escape or let these lizards do what they want with me. You gonna help me?"

"Sure, I'll help."

Chapter 3

The Lizzar Chief of Commanders looked at the new invention with amusement. "How does it work?"

George answered, "Four Lizzars sit on these seats and place their feet on the pedals. The fifth Lizzar sits in the front seat and steers. You can travel much faster this way than by walking."

The Lizzar ordered, "Take the seats, humans! I shall steer! This better work or I'll slice your balls off personally!"

George, Paul, Eddie, and Principal Bone each took a seat while the Chief of Commanders got on his, after discovering how to adjust his tail to sit down. The Chief ordered, "Make it go!"

The four men peddled. The crude pedal-powered framework slowly moved forward.

"Faster! I want to see it go faster than walking!"

The men strained to pedal without getting their chains caught.

George finally dared speak, "Sire, we can't pedal faster because of our

chains. This wasn't designed for anyone with chains on their legs."

The Chief ordered, "Halt!"

The crude vehicle stuttered to a halt as the four men quit pedaling.

He ordered, "Get off! You four! Over here! Get on and pedal! I want to go much faster than those humans can pedal!"

Four Lizzar troops hurried over and took the men's places. They awkwardly put their feet on the pedals and pedaled. In no time at all, they caught the hang of it and were breezing along at close to a running pace.

George whispered, "I think we should have instructed them how to stop."

Paul said, "What about steering? He's still going straight."

Principal Bone whispered, "I just hope the damn thing holds together. I prefer having my balls remain where they are."

Eddie said, "I just hope they don't want many more of those. We've only got but so much bicycle chain from the store and the Lizzars certainly can't make anymore."

• • •

Jim started up the APC while Priscilla stood looking out the turret. She was doing a stand on watch not because she wanted to be equal, but because she was bored staring at naked men and women while her clit felt moist and her brain felt scared. She wasn't sure that it would be safe to let anything sexual get started. It would be too easy for her to slip from her position and let herself have what she wanted most. She couldn't admit that she was a recovering nymphomaniac, one of a very few who tried to suppress their sexual urges so they could live a normal life. She only knew three other women sufferers who were trying to be live normal lives as she was.

It wasn't easy keeping her past hidden so she could climb up the ladder of success to become the warden of a prison. She was only glad that she wasn't given charge of a men's prison.

Her mother, thankfully, learned quickly enough that Priscilla wanted all the men she could handle after catching her in the act with her fifth and sixth boys while skinny dipping in a stream hidden by woods behind their home. It wasn't easy explaining why she was sucking on one while the other was banging away at her as four other exhausted boys watched and urged her on. Her mother had to force her away from them by dragging her by the ankles back through the woods to her home without stopping to

dress her.

After all, she hadn't admitted to her mother that only the weekend before, she had taken on ten boys from the neighborhood. By the time Priscilla finished with them, they were all lying exhausted and drained on the bank of the stream. She'd have had that many again on the day her mother caught her, but some of the boys had chores they couldn't leave.

Then she went to an all-girls' school where there weren't many opportunities to get laid. However, the opportunities did include a few fully grown males who delighted Priscilla even more. They could go deeper and give more when she sucked them until their knees grew weak and trembled from the pleasure she gave them. Priscilla loved to see men become weak trying to master her body. Not one had yet succeeded before she realized that there were other things she needed in life and found others like herself to form a support group with over the Internet.

Now Priscilla was without her support group and felt more naked than merely being without clothes. She struggled to remind herself that she couldn't have the three remaining men until she left them too weak to crawl as though she had drained their life force from them. Their survival and hers depended on Priscilla maintaining her self-control.

Even worse, the constant vibrations from the APC made her hornier than ever, almost like the motorcycle she once accepted a ride on while returning to the girls' school from a shopping trip into town. She and the boy she accepted the ride from didn't get a quarter of the distance before she had his pants open and was stroking him in public. At least, he had enough sense to turn off onto the first dirt road that he came to and get them both out of sight. She remembered that he stopped for a moment and turned to look at her.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"I'm in real trouble if I'm not, wouldn't you say?" she replied. That was before her cravings for more scared him enough that he shoved her aside. He rode off leaving her over a mile from her clothes and store purchases. She had to walk naked down the dirt road to retrieve those. After dressing, she then headed to the highway to walk the rest of the way back to school as he was nowhere in sight. All the while, she desperately wanted another man.

It was the most frustrating day of her life and one that caused her to seek a solution. The solution came on the next shopping trip. That was when she purchased the vibrator and gave herself relief when she needed it. It was only a partial solution, though. However, it carried her through

her private schooling until college.

College was fine until she found out how much other women could hate her for wanting their men. Her roommate brought her boyfriend to the room to make love to him. Then she went into the shower while he remained on the bed. That was the scene that Priscilla remembered walking in upon. It took only the one image of him lying there naked to flame the passions into a roaring fire inside her. While her roommate was showering, she undressed and walked over to him. She was on top of him when her roommate came out of the shower drying her hair and found them. Her friend stopped suddenly, then flew into a rage as she charged.

Her friend shoved her off, almost injuring him at the time. Then it was a knockdown, drag out sort of fight that only lasted a minute or two before he could separate them. Her friend, her ex-friend really, unable to get at her began throwing things out the window, after breaking it with the first objects she threw. The boyfriend, anxious to prevent the fight from going on had restrained Priscilla without either of them realizing what was happening. Before she knew it, her ex-friend had thrown all of Priscilla's stuff out of the third floor window in lieu of throwing out Priscilla herself. Even Priscilla's clothes from the floor went out the window, leaving her with nothing to wear while a crowd gathered at the doorway and listened to her ex-friend rant and rave about what took place. Then the boyfriend was ordered out of the room under the threat of being accused of rape. He ran with his clothes, no longer concerned about keeping the two women apart.

Priscilla stood her ground when her ex-friend came at her again, but other girls grabbed each of them and kept them apart by pulling Priscilla back into the hall. That was when her ex-friend shut the door, locking her out, after demanding that anyone who was her friend wouldn't help Priscilla. As well, she warned them that Priscilla would take their boyfriends, too.

Without anything to wear, Priscilla tried to borrow a towel so she could retrieve her clothing. No one would even lend her so much as a smear of lipstick to cover any part of herself. Left without any choices, Priscilla remembered she had to walk outside into the snow without anything on to gather her clothes and dress herself standing where she could be seen after the girls even shut and blocked the door so she couldn't re-enter the dorm. That was when she realized she had a serious problem and faced it as such.

It was a long haul trying to reform herself without any help at first since what she was addicted to was commonplace and all too freely

available. She remembered all the backsliding she went through over the next few months until she found a support group to help her through the days and nights. Now she found herself standing out in the cold once more, even though the weather was actually summery. Priscilla resisted feeling of herself. She already knew she was wet and ready to take the first offer to come her way. She hoped and prayed that no one would suggest anything that might make her lose her self-control and give in immediately to her desires.

Angelica whispered, "God, but Priscilla is a cold-hearted bitch."

Sasha replied, "Probably never seen a cock before, much less touched one."

"I'm surprised...Well, not really surprised since the warden is so cold. She's probably turned the men off from making any suggestions to any of us," Angelica said.

"Yeah, you'd think that we'd have received some offers by now," Sasha said.

"I fell on Pete and he wasn't too bad beneath me," Angelica said.

"You would have let him?" asked Sasha.

"Not really then, but I'm seriously considering it now. I don't know about you, but now I'm turned on by all this."

Sasha said, "It's the engine vibration doing it. You can get the same effect riding on a motorcycle. I rode once with my boyfriend on his bike. God, were we ever happy before the ride ended."

Angelica asked, "What happened?"

"You want the whole story?"

"Sure I do. Tell me."

"Um, not now. Maybe later when we're alone. Regardless, I think what Priscilla needs is a man. Still, I'm surprised that she hasn't been screaming sexual harassment," Sasha whispered.

"You think she might be, uh, you know?"

"Lesbian? Maybe. She sure don't act normal. She hasn't even made one funny remark about this to ease the situation. I also think she's been looking at us."

"Us? You and me?" asked Angelica.

"You mostly, I think."

"Thanks. Maybe that's why she became a warden in a women's prison. I guess I better keep an eye on her," Angelica said.

"I will, too."

• • •

Andrea waited until she couldn't hear anyone about. She knew for a certainty that they were on some other planet after seeing three moons during the night before Kelly finished covering her. Now she wasn't so sure that it was a good idea to be alone on a strange world without anything to eat, drink, or defend herself with. However, she didn't have much choice anymore. Sooner or later, she had to sit up and take a look around. She only hoped that she wasn't going from the frying pan into the fire.

She held her breath, then sat up while most of the sand covering her upper body fell away. Before she opened her eyes, she shook herself to clear her face. Only then did she look around. Except for the lack of people and lizard people, there was nothing different. It was still a strange world to her. The three moons were disappearing behind the horizon and she was alone. On the other hand, she was free.

• • •

Priscilla blinked her eyes several times before she believed what she was seeing. She dropped down out of the open turret hatch and said, "Stop! There's a car coming!"

"We're not going very far anyway. We're almost out of fuel," Jim said.

"Shut it off then. I just hope they're not more of those lizard people. Everyone get ready to fight," Priscilla said.

Sheila said, "Not again."

Mitch said, "Let me take over the turret, Priscilla. It's about my turn and you look tired."

As he passed by her to take over, she felt his body against hers and wanted him desperately. She gritted her teeth and pursed her lips to fight off the urge to drop to her knees. "No, Mitch, I'm fine. I can handle this."

Sasha whispered, "See? Cold to men."

Angelica replied, "Yeah, I see. You going to tell the others?"

Sasha said, "I think they can see for themselves."

Mitch dropped back inside. He said, "I think they're human!"

"They could be from Conway. If they are, then we're not in as much trouble as we thought," Priscilla said.

Mitch stood back up in the hatchway with his gun drawn and ready just out of sight. He watched the car pull up to within twenty yards before it stopped. There was no mistaking it as being originally made on Earth though it was severely modified with metal plates over the windows and an

opening cut through the roof. The door opened and he readied himself to fight if necessary. A naked teenage woman stepped out of the driver's side and smiled at him.

She asked, "You from Earth?" while standing behind the door.

Priscilla took a chance. "Yes. How about you?"

She said, "Yes. Now whose side are you on?"

Mitch asked, "Side? The human side, of course."

She said, "You were seen leaving Lizzar territory. We don't know whether to trust you or not."

"Lizard territory? You mean those lizard people who tried to kill us?" he asked.

"Lizzars is what they call themselves. You're either on their side or our side."

"We're not on the Lizzar side. We're definitely on your side," Priscilla said.

She asked, "How many of you came here?"

Mitch answered, "A couple of hundred, but only eleven of us escaped. The rest were killed or captured and marched off."

She said, "Okay, come on out and let us see you all as a token of good faith. We'll do the same."

Mitch said into the hatch, "She wants to see all of us. She's just as naked as we are."

"The same thing must have happened to all their clothes," Priscilla said.

Mitch asked, "Well, are we going to show ourselves? They want to see us before they'll trust us."

Sasha giggled.

"You shouldn't have told them how many of us were in here. Now I've got to decide whether we should trust her," Priscilla said.

Mitch asked, "I don't think she's going to wait much longer."

"Okay, open the hatch. We'll let them see us but they're not taking away our weapons, especially since there appears to be a war going on," Priscilla said.

Pete opened the hatch and stepped out first. He was followed by Sheila, then the female officers, Priscilla, and Jim while Mitch remained at the hatchway.

Gail stepped away from the door with a shotgun in her hands. Dennis stood up in the roof opening with another shotgun.

Priscilla said, "Only the two of you survived?"

Gail answered, "No, a lot more, but only ten of us escaped. The rest are

being held as slaves in the mines. A few are possibly traitors.”

Mitch asked, “Where'd you get fuel? You've been gone some time.”

Gail answered, “We had a gas station come with us. The Lizzars can't keep up with our cars and they don't have guns. When we need gas, we run them off from the town and get what we need. Looks like you ran into one of their laser towers, though. They do have those.”

Priscilla said, “The Lizzars are the ones with the lasers? Then why do they use swords and spears?”

Gail replied, “They're kind of like the ancient Persians. The Persians had electricity while their weapons were swords and spears. Here, the Lizzars got lucky enough to develop their knowledge of electricity beyond what the Persians ever achieved. The Persians mostly used their knowledge to electroplate things with gold. I learned that from reading the books we saved from the town. I'm Gail. That's my husband, Dennis. Who are you all?”

“I'm Warden Priscilla Honor. That's Sheila, my secretary. The rest are my prison officers,” Priscilla said.

Dennis said, “Shit! Just what we don't need!”

“They might know tactics like the coach did,” Gail said.

“If you think that we're going to take on the Lizzars, as you say they call themselves, with only twenty-one people, then I'm not sure about your sanity,” Priscilla said.

Gail said, “It's not just us. Would you mind putting your guns down?”

“We're not giving up our weapons,” Priscilla said.

“I mean point them down and don't get agitated. I don't want you to shoot our allies,” Gail said.

“Your allies?” asked Priscilla.

“Right, we're allied with someone else. It's not just the ten of us against the Lizzars or even twenty-one with you. Just point your weapons down and don't shoot them. Then turn around slowly and say hi to your new friends,” Gail said.

Priscilla turned slowly while pointing her gun down. Her eyes opened at the sight of what she first thought of as a herd of centaurs. She felt herself become moist between her legs as she couldn't help but immediately notice how well hung all the males were. She wanted to run up to one and throw herself under him. Surely, they'd be good for several hours each of fun. For the first time in her life, she felt weak in the knees at seeing so much available at one time.

“Hi, I'm Sub-commander Theo of the Second Cohort. Welcome to the

alliance.”

Priscilla stared at Theo as he slowly approached. She was disappointed when he turned so that she couldn't see what she most liked about him.

“I'm Warden...I'm Priscilla. So, we're allies. How's this alliance thing work?”

Theo said, “Right now, we're learning how to make things and to speak better English while we learn to read it better. When we can make more advanced weapons, then we'll take on the Lizzars and end their war of subjugation. We only wish to live in peace.”

“Sure, if you want one,” Priscilla replied before blushing as she realized that she almost gave herself away.

Theo said, “I don't understand. Is this more of your colorful language?”

“I got tongue-tied. I'm not used to meeting centaurs,” Priscilla said.

Dennis asked, “How's your vehicle for fuel?”

Jim looked at Priscilla before she answered, “We're almost out. We don't have much food or water, either. All we have are our weapons and enough ammunition to fight off a few, um, Lizzars.”

Dennis said, “Save your bullets for the laser towers and their leaders. The Lizzars are learning tactics from a traitor.”

“We don't know for sure that he's a traitor. They could be forcing him to cooperate,” Gail said.

“Then we have trouble. We were running a prison. The Lizzars captured only convicts as far as I know. Some of them will work with anyone if it benefits them,” Priscilla said.

Dennis said, “Shit, that's all we needed. Convicts. How many guns did they capture?”

“None. We locked up the armory tight as a drum before we left,” Priscilla answered.

Gail exclaimed, “You can provide more guns? More ammo?”

Priscilla answered, “We might.”

Gail shouted, “Theo! Send runners to Over Commander Zira! He needs to know this at once!”

Theo pointed to three strong-looking centaurs. He said, “Inform Zira of the news! Hurry!”

The three galloped away quickly as if in a horse race. It was only then that Priscilla noticed that two of them carried high-powered rifles.

Gail walked over to the APC. “We're going to have to educate you as well. You're lucky that you didn't go into the forest last night. There are things in there that guns are useless against. We'll start off talking about

coil vines. Then I'll explain what we know about how things work around here."

• • •

The Lizzar Chief of Commanders said, "I'm disappointed that there is no technology in the building taken from Earth. Get another section! I want their technology! Next time, there better not be any escapes when we move in. The next commander who permits that to happen will hang from a tower while the laser slices him into small pieces starting from the feet up!"

"But sire! The tractor beam must be recharged before it can be used again. If we try again now, anything we grab will fall apart without enough energy to keep it intact while it travels at great speeds."

"How long must I wait?"

The Lizzar technician answered, "Five days, sire."

"You have four! You've already squandered one day during which it should have been recharging! Four days only! Then I want another piece of Earth. It better have technology on it."

"Sire, we can only grab from where we can pick up a signal. The Earth men call it radio frequency. There is almost always some technology where such signals originate. It's just that we can't control where the Earth people use that radio frequency and we can only take the one that's strongest when we seek it out. Believe me sire. We are doing our best."

The Chief said, "Then do better! I want their technology and I want it fast! No more excuses."

• • •

Priscilla asked, "Will our APC be okay where it is?"

Gail answered, "Some of our allies will remain nearby to guard it. If your people will go with us to Conway to get diesel fuel, we can get you mobile once more."

Priscilla asked, "Why do you need us for that?"

Dennis said, "Because you have more guns and ammunition than we have. All we have left are shotgun shells. They're good for close in groups of Lizzars, but useless for picking off their leaders at long range and throwing them into confusion. Your rifles mean the difference between getting in easily or having to fight off hundreds of Lizzars. The centaurs have some bullets, but not many."

"Makes some sense to me. After all, they have months of experience

fighting the Lizzars. How many shotgun shells have you? Ours went bad with our clothing," Jim said.

Dennis said, "We can spare a few boxes if you need them. Of course, we'd like something in return. For instance, bullets for some of our other weapons would be a good trade."

Priscilla asked, "Jim, would it be a good trade?"

"I think it would. Even if we have to give a few guns along with the bullets, I think we'd come out pretty good, all in all," he answered.

"You've got the beginnings of a deal. I'll let Jim handle the transaction. As to having some of us go with you to Conway...", Priscilla said.

"Some of us should, Priscilla. After all, they're getting the fuel for our benefit and risking their lives in the process," Jim said.

Priscilla said, "I need to speak with Jim in private for a moment. Could you excuse us, please?"

Gail replied, "Sure."

Priscilla took Jim by the elbow and walked a short distance away with him. She stopped and he faced her.

He asked, "What's the problem?"

"I'm the problem. First off, I don't know as much about weapons as you or the other officers. Second, I don't know tactics or strategy. I'm an administrator. Third, we know now that we're not likely going to ever see Earth again, except for the little pieces brought here by the Lizzars. We don't have any reason to hold out hope that the Lizzars will send us back if they lose this war. We're not even sure they can if they're willing. Their device could be only one way."

"So, what are you leading up to?"

"I've reached the conclusion that I don't have the right to lead you and the others any longer. Not only that, but this world offers me something that I tried to put behind me and forget about. I've decided that I'd rather return to what I like most and leave the rest of you to choose your own leader, if you feel you need one. I wanted you to know this now so you can handle the trade. I'll tell the others once we all get together again later today."

Jim asked, "What are you going to do? I don't understand."

"I'll discuss this in more detail when we're all together. In the meantime, you have my blessings to give away the prison if you want. Go on back and negotiate. I'll talk some more with you later. I need to speak with Theo now."

• • •

Andrea felt sure she made a mistake when she came in sight of the prison and saw that there were still lizard troops around it. Unless she could get back into it, she'd not get any water or food.

• • •

Jim handed over Dude's weapons and enough ammunition to reload those twice more in exchange for an equal number of shotgun rounds. Regardless of whether anyone else was going along to get the fuel, he promised that he would. If anything, he was curious about what Conway looked like after hearing how the situation had been. He was more than a bit interested in seeing what a football coach came up with in defending the town against the Lizzars. He'd certainly held out longer than anyone had a right to expect under the circumstances.

Dennis asked, "Are you also going back with us to the prison to empty the armory before the Lizzars? I think four days from now ought to work out for everyone involved. We'll have several cohorts with us so we'll be going in strength."

"I will. Hopefully, most of the others will go with us as well. I'll be talking with them later," Jim answered.

"That's good. I'm curious why Priscilla isn't in our talk," Gail said.

"So am I. That's part of what we'll be discussing later. All I know right now is that she concluded that she doesn't know tactics or weapons well enough to remain our leader. There's something else she'd rather do and she intends to do it, whatever it is. Sure beats me what it could be. She didn't give me a single clue. I mean, if it's our nudity, I'm willing to wear some leaves over my privates so I won't embarrass her. That is, if we can find any that aren't dangerous. Anyway, soon as I find out, I'll let you know unless it's too personal and she asks for us to keep it confidential," Jim said.

With the negotiations concluded, Jim searched for the rest of his friends so he could learn more about what Priscilla intended to do.

• • •

As the sun began to set, Andrea memorized where the Lizzars were so she could try to sneak past them once it got dark. She knew that the slightest mistake would see her captured once more with no chance for escape.

• • •

"I asked for everyone to attend this meeting because what I say and do from now on can affect all of you. First off, I don't know tactics or weapons. Without that knowledge, I'm not the best choice for being a leader. Then there's another reason," Priscilla said.

"There was a time when I didn't mind being who I was. Then I found out that it earned me numerous enemies, so I changed myself. It wasn't easy and I only managed to get by with help from a small support group. No, I'm not a recovering alcoholic or gambler. What I suffer from is harder to protect me and you from than just keeping alcoholic beverages or money out of my hands. You could say that, until now, I was a recovering nymphomaniac. I can't help myself when I'm around men. I simply have to have them. Worse yet, for some of you who are married, I want them all and I really don't care if they're married to you or anyone else. That doesn't mean I want to hurt their wives or anyone's girlfriend or make them hate me, but I'm addicted to men. I'm in a situation now where I'm going to fall off the wagon whether I want to or not. I'm literally going out of my skull trying to keep my hands off every man around. That's the last reason why I'm not fit to lead anyone. If I remained as your leader, I might not be able to give any commands at a critical juncture because I surrendered to myself and began playing with someone. You need someone more dependable under our current circumstances. You'll have to pick someone else to lead you."

"In the meantime, I'm designating myself the official prostitute for any man or centaur serving our side. If you want me, just tell me. I'll be yours for as long as you can last. Don't even worry if someone else is with me. I've taken on as many as five at a time and loved every minute of it. As far as I'm concerned, the more the merrier."

Sasha's mouth dropped open while Angelica glanced over at her with her own mouth half open. Gail looked stunned while her hand tightened on Dennis's. Most of the men then realized that Priscilla was glancing around at their groins. Aware of that, a few became erect.

Priscilla moved toward Pete. She asked, "Would you mind?" as she dropped to her knees and reached out for him.

• • •

Jim woke up and looked around the camp. Priscilla was sleeping soundly

between two of the four men she succeeded in getting the evening before. She was going strong for close to two hours before they finally gave out on her completely and went to sleep. Even then, she hadn't stopped. Jim was amazed to see her still going strong when his turn at guard came up during the night. She'd even offered herself to him while he stood guard, but he had gently refused. He'd seen how she literally wore out the other men in short order.

Even before Jim went to sleep, he'd overheard some of the women talking in low hushes.

"My god, she's doing them all at once!" Sasha exclaimed.

Angelica said, "One thing for sure, she's not a Lesbian. I guess she was looking at us to keep from losing her self-control. Don't you agree?"

"Must have been why," Sasha agreed.

"I wonder how she ever became that way," Shirley said.

"I once knew a girl who was like that. She couldn't keep her hands off the guys once she tried one. We lost a basketball game once because she wore out the whole team one time just hours before the game. She went right through the first string all the way to the last substitute. She even laid the water boy," Sasha said.

Angelica asked, "Did she get caught?"

"Not by anyone who mattered, but the coach put her off limits on game days until after the game, if they won. Sure inspired most of the players to really hustle out on the court. That game and one other were the only ones we lost that season. If we hadn't lost that one because of her, we would have gone on to the regionals. Maybe even the state finals," Sasha answered.

"Did you hate her like Priscilla said happened to her?" Audrey asked.

"No, but some girls did because they couldn't keep their boyfriends away from her. The only girls who succeeded were those who fought fire with fire. We sure had a lot of pregnancies that year because of girls putting out to keep their boyfriends from straying," Sasha said.

"Did you? Fight fire with fire, that is since you didn't hate her?" Shirley asked.

"Well, maybe I did hate her because she could get away with what she did. Yeah, I fought fire with fire. When my boyfriend said that he could get a blow job and laid by her, I had little choice but to give him as much as he could get from her or lose him. I learned from him what she did and gave him the same treatment. I busted my ass screwing him until he was so tired that I had to roll him off me. Since he played football, I rewarded him

after every game, win or lose to keep him from her," Sasha answered.

"Every game?" asked Angelica.

"Yep, every game. For most of that year, which was my senior year, I didn't even bother wearing panties since they usually ended up wet. I wasn't much in the mood to pleasure him and then wear wet panties."

"I can understand that," Angelica said.

"That wasn't the worst of it. I had to prove that I could be as daring as she was. More than once, I fucked Roy in front of some of his friends, but I drew the line at doing them, too."

"I don't blame you," Audrey said.

Shirley said, "Well, I only know that I had sex before any of you."

Sasha asked, "When was that?"

Shirley answered, "Age six."

Audrey exclaimed, "Your father took you?"

"No, I did it with the boy next door. He was also six."

Sasha exclaimed, "Wow! How was it?"

Shirley said, "Truthfully, it was really nothing because he couldn't get an erection and could only barely touch me with what little he had. Still, we were both naked and trying our best to make like our parents who we caught in the act by accident. We figured we'd soon be brother and sister, so it was all right for us to do like our parents."

Angelica asked, "Did you get caught?"

"Sure we did, but nothing really happened other than some explanations about sex being for adults," Shirley answered.

Sasha asked, "But when was your real first time? You know, the time you really lost your virginity?"

Shirley replied, "Not until high school."

Audrey exclaimed, "Not another boyfriend jock story."

Shirley asked, "Okay, how'd you lose yours?"

Audrey answered, "To a lifeguard. He pulled me from the ocean when I was caught by the current. He really saved my life and I met him when he got off duty. That was when I arranged to meet him later in the evening on the beach. He was gorgeous. Not only that, but he was polite and well hung. We met at sunset on the beach and watched the sun go down before we got down to business. He was quite a good lover, despite the fact that I screwed up and managed to get sand on us at the wrong time. That was the only thing that spoiled our fun. It was worse than when he popped my cherry. Plus it hurt him too, but he didn't complain at all. Anyway, we still managed to do pretty well that night despite my inexperience."

• • •

The camp remained quiet as Jim walked about on guard against some of the predatory denizens of the new world he was part of. He hadn't seen but one so far. The quick demonstration of a coil vine striking something that triggered it was more than enough to convince him that he didn't want to go into the forest without a machete or an armored vehicle. He hoped that he wouldn't come up against any of the other predators. Not without plenty of firepower.

• • •

Andrea crawled part of the distance to the prison when she had to pass close to some lizard people standing guard. Their very presence almost made her skin crawl, but she had little choice by then. She either got into the prison where she could find food and water, or surrendered, or died. She didn't like the last two choices.

Once she reached the slope leading up to the prison, she considered herself lucky to find a sword lightly covered by dirt. She took it in hand while noticing that it was heavy and awkward to use. Still, it was a weapon and bettered the odds against her. At least, it came in useful for scaling the steep slope as she could jab it into the dirt to make steps for her feet while she climbed.

She desperately wanted to cheer herself upon reaching the top of the slope. However, she was wise enough to know that any noise might be investigated. As well, the three moons were rising and she had to get out of sight. Still fearing discovery, she hurried toward the building while not looking at the sight of dismembered bodies of women she was once in prison with. It was more difficult for her to ignore the stench from their bodies. She had to clasp one hand over her mouth to keep from throwing up, though she had little to lose. As she entered the darker interior of the prison, she listened carefully as she moved about, hoping that none of the lizard people were exploring instead of sleeping. She made directly for the kitchen if only because she wanted something to eat and drink despite the stench of death still lingering in her nostrils.

• • •

"Okay, there's the town!" Dennis hollered.

Jim stared at the town atop a mound of dirt from Earth in the middle of

the plain. It was similar to how he remembered last seeing the prison. It, too, was perched upon a mound of soil from Earth, though part of it was unstable and threatening to collapse.

Dennis said, "We should be able to find a barrel or two to fill with diesel fuel. That ought to be enough to get your APC to the town to fill up the tanks completely. You'll have to worry more about spare parts first before fuel becomes a concern again."

Jim replied, "That's good to know. Now that we have friends to support us, we can return and get some parts as well as emptying the armory. I think everyone will benefit."

Dennis said, "Okay, remember, use the rifle at long range to kill any Lizzar leaders if you can spot them. Use the shotgun at close range. Reserve your pistol for face-to-face stuff. Two cars will circle the town. You and I will take our cars into the town and get the fuel after we exterminate the pests."

"Okay, tell him we'll follow. I'm ready," Angelica said.

"Got it! We're ready!" Jim hollered back.

The four cars roared toward the town. As they reached it, two split off and circled. One car, fitted with special bumpers, took the lead. It could easily hit and dispose of any Lizzars with its bumpers and not have to waste precious ammunition.

Gail powered the car up the graded slope into the town. Not far behind her, Angelica did the same. They stayed close together as they drove slowly through the town. Had they driven around the town once, Angelica and Jim would have seen piles of Lizzar bones, the last remains of Lizzar casualties from earlier fighting.

Jim stood in the open roof of his car while Dennis did the same in the front car. He said, "Seems quiet and deserted."

Dennis said, "It probably is now. The Lizzars took what we didn't take and we didn't leave much. We came back the day after the town fell and took the generators and some other equipment we knew they'd want. They probably won't make that mistake the next time. When we get to the prison in a few days, there's going to be a lot of stuff missing that they'll have beat us to. So far, it looks clear, but there could still be some predators hanging around. All those dead Lizzars lured in lots of scavengers for awhile. The worst is the frilled mountain dog. It's not very big, but the frill surrounding its neck ends in poisonous barbs. At the least, it can make you sick. Get jabbed with too many of those and you can kiss your ass goodbye. I suggest a shotgun for dealing with them. We collect the barbs.

The centaurs use those for arrows after stripping the flesh away.”

“I'll keep that in mind,” Jim said.

Dennis said, “Stop your car away from the pumps. We never park our cars close together unless we're out in the open and expect to be attacked. Then we form them in a circle so we can all head in different directions if there are too many coming at us. Here in town, we like enough space so we can all maneuver for the only exit.”

Both cars soon stopped. Gail drove the lead car right up to the pumps. Dennis got out while she stood guard. He busied himself attaching electrical cables to the pump from the generator in the trunk of his car. Then he attached the hose to the pump. He went ahead and filled the gas tank of his car as it was the more important vehicle because it contained the generator. Once he completed that, he searched around for a suitable empty barrel to hold diesel fuel. After ten minutes of searching, he was disgusted for not taking one before.

“The Lizzars got all the barrels. We'll have to drag your vehicle here. Bring your car over and fill up. Once your car is full, take over for the rear car circling the town so they can refuel. They'll take over for the lead car while it refuels. Then we'll head back for the APC so we can get busy bringing it here. I guess we'll need our reserve car as well and a cohort or two to escort us.”

Angelica drove to the pump, stopped, and said, “Fill 'er up! And don't forget the windshield!”

• • •

Dennis rechecked the chains attached to the APC. He said, “You're lucky that you didn't have to drive between two laser towers. They would have sliced you into pieces. We're still wiping out the towers in this direction. In fact, we were on our way to take out some more towers when we spotted you.”

Pete said, “I, for one, am glad that you did.”

Dennis said, “I am too, now. At first, I was afraid that you'd be like some of the other authority figures we had to deal with who tried to negotiate with the Lizzars only to get themselves captured and used against us. I didn't much like the idea of possibly going against you in an APC if you wouldn't at least declare neutrality.”

“I don't remember that choice being offered,” Jim said.

Dennis said, “Well, you all could have suggested it. We would have

gladly accepted that stance. Still, I'm glad that you're on our side."

"I hope all these chains hold," Jim said.

Dennis said, "Well, if they don't, then we'll figure out another way to get the APC to town for fuel."

Pete said, "You could have drained one of the cars and towed it back with diesel in its tank. Wouldn't that have worked?"

Dennis said, "I never thought of that. If we get to running low on fuel, maybe we'll do it that way after all."

Chapter 4

Mike sat down at her ham radio set, one of the few things she wouldn't leave at home now that she was in college. She rubbed her head with a towel to dry her hair some more rather than use a hair dryer as the motor created radio frequency interference. She knew she'd have to get dressed soon and go out to the library. Still, she had some time to spare and wanted to chat with some of her ham wave buddies.

A knock came at the door. Unconcerned about wearing only a towel around her since she was in a women's dormitory, she answered the door. She stared wide-eyed at the young man standing on the other side of the doorway after she opened it.

He said, "I'm sorry. I must have the wrong room number. I thought this was room 201."

"This is 201. Who are you looking for?"

"Uh, Mike. I was told I could find Mike in room 201. You wouldn't happen to know him, would you? My father asked me to stop by and invite Mike over for dinner."

Mike giggled, then said, "I'm Mike. Short for Michelle. Your father must be a ham wave operator."

"Yes, he is."

"So am I. What's your father's name?" she replied.

"Duh! I'm sorry. I haven't introduced myself or anything. I'm Steven. My father is George Amber."

"Yes, I know George quite well. He even talked about you. You lead quite a charmed life, all in all."

"You know about me?"

"Some," Mike admitted. "Would you mind stepping in or out so I won't have to hold the door open? My hair is still wet."

"You don't mind me entering?"

"I think I know how to handle you. Charmed life or not," as she stepped aside so he could enter.

He stepped into the room while she closed the door. "Well, uh, do you want to come over for dinner?"

She answered, "Well, it depends. Will we be nude?"

"You're a nudist, too?"

"Of course. That's part of why I liked talking to your father so much. He had so much to say about the nudist lifestyle, I went ahead and tried it. Now I feel like I've missed out on so much before. If the dinner is going to be nude, I'll gladly attend. In fact, you're welcome to strip now if you'd like to be more comfortable. I only have this on because I just stepped out of the shower and didn't want to drip on anything," she said, letting the towel around her body fall to the floor.

"You really don't mind?" he asked as his hands went up to his shirt buttons.

"I'd prefer it, actually. What day and time will the dinner be?"

"My father was hoping that you'd join us for dinner either today or tomorrow, whichever is more convenient for you."

She said, "In that case, tomorrow is definitely better for me. I plan on being in the library most of the day, unfortunately wearing clothes. Someday someone ought to create a nude university dedicated to the principles of open and frank discussions of issues and education more than any other educational institution has ever been known to be. You'd be surprised at what isn't discussed on this campus and it's supposed to be training our minds. Instead, most of the educators are interested only in themselves and their own pet theories. Anything else is considered either the enemy or insignificant. It's to be excluded whenever possible. Lord help those who show themselves to be free thinkers."

"Is nudism included?"

"That depends on when and where as well as what conditions apply. If four Lesbians want to get naked, that's okay. Put a man and a woman of heterosexual inclination together in the buff, most of the people here start believing that there's sexual harassment taking place unless you also have a dog or horse involved. Then it's diversity."

"So, we're pushing our luck like this?" he asked as he removed the last of his clothes.

"It depends on the circumstances. No one will say much of anything unless we put forth a petition demanding space on campus and in the student lounge. That's when they'd question our motives. Our petition would trigger their response. They're like Pavlovian dogs in that respect."

Steve asked, "So, tomorrow is going to be okay with you?"

"Yes, it will. Did you have a time in mind? It doesn't much matter to me since my hours are so uselessly jumbled. I can't ever look forward to knowing each day when I'll stop to eat. Setting a time will be a luxury to me."

"Six?"

Mike answered, "Six is fine."

"Do you need a ride? We're not exactly that close to campus that you can walk the distance."

"Yes, I'd appreciate one."

"Then I'll be by to pick you up. Say, at five? Unless you'd like some time to socialize. We do have a privacy fence so we won't disturb the neighbors. Well, on three sides. Our other neighbor is also a nudist. We didn't see any need to shut each other off."

"I don't mind going earlier. Even four is okay with me. So, have you had anymore daring escapes?"

Steve blushed, then nodded.

She said, "Why not go ahead and tell me about it? I'd love to hear the latest."

"You're sure?"

"I'm positive. I've never met anyone who's been near death so often and emerged without a scratch."

"Well, my father exaggerates somewhat. I've actually picked up a few scratches along the way."

"Well, without serious injury. So, what's the latest?"

"You ought to add the words dumb stunt to that sentence. My latest involved riding a bicycle. I tried to take a shortcut. What I didn't know was that there was a difference in the ground level between the buildings that wasn't apparent from the road where all I ever experienced was a slight grade. Anyway, I just wasn't thinking when I saw the fence and angled toward the opening where the sidewalk led. I was too close to it when I realized that there were steps going down. The fence was merely to keep anyone from stepping off a landscape retainer wall. I tried to hit my brakes, but I was already too close to stop. Hitting my brakes was the worst possible thing to do since I didn't have enough speed to clear the steps."

Instead, my front wheel dropped to the next step. I bumped down along a couple of steps before I flipped and crashed. Anyway, my charmed existence continued to hold firm since I didn't get injured. All I did was tear my clothing and twist the handlebars slightly off center."

"Didn't it hurt?"

Steve answered, "Sure, it hurt some, but all I got was this one bruise here. It hurt my pride the most because I knew it was stupid to do what I did."

She looked at the bruise on his hip and shook her head. "I probably would have broken my arm or neck. You do lead a charmed life."

He asked, "Am I keeping you from anything?"

"Not at all. I'm not going anywhere until my hair is dry."

There was a knock at the door. Mike went over to it without bothering to slip on anything. She opened the door and said, "Miranda! Come in, I want you to meet Steve Amber."

Miranda entered the room wearing only a smile. She glanced at Steve, smiled while she waved, and said, "Hi," before turning back to Mike. "I'm planning on going to the club tomorrow. Want to come?"

"I just promised Steve that I'd visit and stay for dinner tomorrow. I'm sorry if I'm disappointing you."

Miranda said, "Okay, how about next weekend then? I've got two, really, hot prospects for club membership. I want you along to act as a welcomer so they won't feel that they don't know anyone there. I've got Debra and Connie interested."

"That's great! Sure, next weekend is open. I'll be available."

Steve asked, "Do you just walk around like that in the dorm?"

Miranda said, "Why not?"

He replied, "No reason why. I just wondered is all. Mike was telling me how some people act toward nudism."

Miranda said, "Oh, the campus politics. Well, they'd probably like it if I didn't walk around like this in the dorm, but I threatened to sue them for depriving me of my civil rights since this dorm is my home while I'm here. I figure I should have as much right to use the common areas in the same manner as I'd use my home. It's not my fault that I have to share them with others. The college is the one that requires us to live on campus during our first two years. Since they're insisting on that, I'm insisting on my rights. Besides, it's a good way to show that I'm otherwise normal and that nudism isn't at all sexual and evil. If we get Debra and Connie to join, I'll have assisted six women into membership, all total."

"Yes, besides what your father told me, Miranda was the other person who convinced me that nudism wasn't at all sexual," Mike said.

Miranda said, "Of course, that doesn't mean that we don't take a look at what the men have. If nothing else, at least we'll know what we'd be getting if we become serious about anyone."

• • •

Andrea quietly hid in a closet as daybreak arrived. She hadn't found much to drink in the prison, but she'd found more than enough dry foods that she wasn't worried about starving.

• • •

Mike entered her dorm with her books from the library. Miranda got up and walked over to talk with her as she made her way to her room.

"God, did you see Steve, gal? I don't think I've ever seen anyone like him before. Tan, tall, and hung."

"Interested in him, Miranda?"

"No, but that doesn't mean I can't appreciate the male anatomy, especially when it's so ruggedly, handsomely packaged. He made me wet between my legs just seeing him in your room today. Would you mind if I drop by to see him one more time when he picks you up tomorrow?"

Mike answered, "I don't mind. You do sound like you're seriously interested in him, though."

"Honey, I certainly wouldn't kick him out of bed for eating crackers. However, I was thinking that he'd be a fine subject for me to sketch, especially if he's willing to pose nude for me."

"Um, yeah, I keep forgetting that you have art classes."

Miranda said, "I'd even consider sketching the two of you in whatever pose you like. If you have him show up early enough, I could do it before you two leave. You do have his phone number, don't you?"

"No, I don't, but his father has a ham radio. I can contact him that way."

"Would you? Please? For me? I really want to sketch him."

"I'll ask him. I'm still not sure if I want myself in any pose. Even with Steve."

Miranda said, "Trust me. You might have doubts now. However, if you don't, then someday you'll wish you had your likeness captured while you were young and in full bloom. Besides, it's become quite the rage, even for

women who aren't nudists to have their nude likeness posed and captured. You wouldn't believe how many women I've sketched or painted so far. It's a lot better than waiting tables, too, as far as what I make doing this. You'd be getting yours for free."

"Well, now. You never mentioned free before."

"I didn't? Okay, I guess I wasn't clear about that. If you'll let me pose and sketch you, it's for free because you're my friend. Okay?"

Mike replied, "Since it's free, I guess I could use one sketch of me au natural for posterity."

"Of course, I'd also like you in the pose with Steve. God! What a pose I can create with the two of you! It'd be like the modern day Adonis and Aphrodite."

"So long as it isn't dirty."

"It won't be, but some minds see dirt anyway. Nude implies smut to them. Don't blame me for what some people might say."

• • •

Andrea could tell that something was happening. The lizard people weren't very interested in the prison, yet there were too many of them present. Only a few of them even ventured into the prison during the day. They hadn't done much that she could hear. What she ate during the day she had to dissolve in her mouth rather than risk chewing and crunching. It was silly, she knew, to think that she might be heard eating. Still, she wasn't going to take any risks.

Now, with the night already upon her, she was wondering what was up since the lizard people seemed to be gathering outside the prison. She hoped they weren't going to search the prison just for her. She knew that if that many of them searched, there was no way for her to remain hidden. With that many searching, one would surely find her.

• • •

Jim stood in the open hatch of the APC. He held his rifle at the ready. Around him, the cars drove with less speed than usual. For that reason, they weren't kicking up dust as they usually did. Their course was already behind Lizzar lines. It made no sense to exit into centaur territory, cross along the front, and then dodge back into Lizzar territory to reach the prison. The direct course was saving them both time and fuel. He wondered just how much of the prison's contents would be gone like Dennis and the

others said. They seemed positive that the Lizzars would drag off everything except for the bricks, stones, and dirt.

• • •

Steve showed up, knocked, and entered Mike's room. He noticed that she was serious about being a nudist as neither woman was wearing anything when Miranda opened the door. He walked in and briefly looked at Miranda as she sat back down with her sketch pad.

Mike turned away from her radio, though she left it on. "Go ahead and undress, Steve. Miranda wants to get you sketched down first so she won't delay us. She can fill me in at just about anytime later."

Steve undressed as he said, "Okay, sounds good to me. I never thought of myself as a model."

Miranda said, "Lord knows, you could pull in the bucks as a model, Steve. What doesn't show when you're dressed keeps you from appearing all that unique. But, when you're nude, there aren't many men who can stand the comparison."

Mike asked, "Anyone mind if I open the window some?"

Miranda said, "Might be a good idea. It does feel a bit warm in here today."

Steve said, "Uh, if you do, I'm likely to get an erection."

Miranda said, "Won't bother me any. Might even improve the pose, though I already think it's going to be great."

The lights went out just before Mike opened the window. Only pale sunlight filtered through. She noticed there was fog outside. She was surprised to see the fog swirl in thickly through the window as soon as it opened.

Miranda asked, "What happened to the lights? Didn't the college pay the electric bill?"

Mike said, "Was there fog outside when you drove up?"

Steve answered, "Uh, no. It was absolutely clear outside."

"Well, we've got fog now. Hell, it's just pouring in through the window," Mike said.

Steve exclaimed, "Hey, this stuff is getting thick! You better close the window."

Mike shut the window, but the fog didn't dissipate in the least.

Miranda said, "I can't draw without light, anyway. Wait here while I go check around to see if it's just us or this floor. It could be a blown fuse

from too many hair dryers." Miranda barely reached the door and opened it when a woman's scream pierced the air.

"Sounded like it came from down the hall. Come on, Steve. We better find out if anyone's hurt," Mike said.

"Like this?" he asked.

"Sorry, I forgot this was a women's dorm. We'll check. You wait here." Mike hurried out of her room. There was fog in the ever darkening hallway already that swirled about just below her knees. As she made her way quickly down the hall, the fog gradually rose higher. She listened carefully as she moved down the hall and decided that the crying sounds she could now hear were from whoever screamed before. The crying came from the bath room.

Mike entered it only to have even more fog billow down upon her while a strange sensation struck her all over. Mike shuddered slightly only to notice immediately that her hair didn't brush against her back as it should have. At the same time, she heard the woman crying, "My hair is gone!"

Mike reached up and felt for her own hair only to discover that it was missing. Startled to find herself suddenly bald, she stopped and felt of her head with both hands as if it might only be something she imagined. Still feeling nothing on her head, she asked, "What did you do? My hair just disappeared!"

The woman cried, "I was only washing my hair with shampoo when it suddenly disappeared. I'm bald! I can't go out on a date tonight with no hair!"

"What the hell were you washing it with?" Mike asked just as another scream tore through the dorm.

"My hair! My beautiful hair! It's gone!"

"Someone else is bald now? Sorry, I thought you caused this. I was about to blame you. Maybe it isn't your fault after all," Mike said.

"I've always used this shampoo! This isn't even a new bottle! So, no! I didn't cause this!" the woman angrily replied.

"I already said I'm sorry for thinking you caused this. Excuse me, but I'm as bald as a cue ball, too. And it only happened the moment I opened this door. What the hell was I supposed to think at first?"

Before Mike went five paces in the fog shrouded hallway, more screams about missing hair reached her. She shivered at the thought of something in the air causing everyone to go bald. Someone with a candle approached her in the hallway. Mike asked, "Who's there?"

"It's me, Miranda. The fuse box isn't blown. There's no power anywhere

in the building. I found a candle for now."

Mike asked, "Have you checked your hair?"

Miranda said, "Not yet. I heard the screams about it, though."

"Mine's gone, too," Mike said.

Miranda reached within three feet of Mike and stopped. She stared intensely at Mike.

Mike asked, "Something wrong?"

"Did you check anywhere besides your head?"

Mike felt of herself as she answered, "No, uh..."

"Mike, you look scary without any eyebrows or eyelashes."

"No more scarier than you. You don't have a hair on your body, Miranda, that I can see," Mike replied.

"Thanks, I was hoping that I wasn't affected. Not your fault, though. Do you think we should start a hair club for women?"

Mike suddenly remembered, "Oh god! Steve's here too! It could be affecting him as well."

Miranda said, "Not his beautiful hair! Please, not his!" as more screams and crying filtered through the fog to them from other rooms.

Mike said, "I don't think we can do anything for anyone right now. I guess I better find Steve and see if he wants to take me to his father's now. Can we catch you later for doing sketches?"

Miranda answered, "Without lights, I might have managed somehow. Without his hair, I'm not sure if I'd be able to concentrate without laughing or crying. I guess we better reschedule the sketches."

"Hold the light closer to the doorway so we can see which room we're at."

Miranda held the candle closer so they could read the room number. They turned and walked toward Mike's room.

Mike asked, "You still here, Steve?" as they entered the room.

"Yes. Are you both bald?" he replied.

Miranda said, "As cue balls. What about you?"

"Yeah...I heard the screams. Whatever it is, it got me too. Feels strange not having any hair on my body," he answered.

"I thought I'd call your father and tell him we're arriving early while preparing him for our appearance," Mike said.

Steve said, "Well, we might leave now, but as thick as this fog is, we'll be lucky to arrive on time. I'd mention that it's really thick, Mike."

"Yes, I guess I better. I'm glad I have a battery backup on my radio."

Mike went over to her radio and turned it on. It pulled in power from the

battery and was soon ready for use. "Can you hold that candle nearer, Miranda, so I can see what I'm doing?"

"Sure," Miranda said as she moved closer.

Mike began calling out her call sign and George's. She released the transceiver switch to listen. She was about to call again when she heard something very faintly. Mike reached for the volume and turned up the gain. A moment later, she was staring wide-eyed and open-mouthed at her set as she listened to herself talk with George. It only took her a moment to realize it was a conversation from several days earlier, even though the sound was coming in small bits of a few words before being replaced with something that was said just before it.

Miranda said, "That sounds like you."

"It is me. These are pieces of conversations I had during the past week. Something's seriously wrong," Mike said.

"What's wrong?" asked Miranda.

Mike replied, "I don't know what's wrong. I just know that something is totally wrong."

Steve said, "I have the same feeling. Something's terribly wrong, but I don't know what, either. We better get dressed so we can leave."

"Yes, we should. I guess we'll be a big surprise now for sure," Mike said.

• • •

"Do you have a piece of Earth?"

"Yes, sire. So far, it's holding together, even though we needed another day to recharge the tractor beam."

"When it arrives, I want it placed over there in the location my troops have surrounded. Make sure you set it down quickly without breaking it."

• • •

Dennis signaled the force to halt upon seeing another signal from one of the returning centaur scouts. The combined force of humans and centaurs waited for the scouts to reach them.

"Dennis! The Lizzars are gathered outside the prison."

"They've spotted us?" asked Dennis.

"No! They have a strange formation. They surround nothing. The Lizzars appear to be waiting."

Over Commander Zira suggested, "Then they're probably waiting for

another piece of Earth. Perhaps the prison didn't provide them with enough technology."

Dennis said, "Either way, we have little choice now. We must attack to get the weapons. We must also stop them from receiving any new technology from whatever they ripped away from Earth."

Zira agreed, "Yes, that is so. Commander Haro, send runners back for the reserves. They are to move forward and join us in the attack against the Lizzars. Have them send runners to other sectors advising them that we are committing everything to this battle and may need assistance."

Dennis said, "We better get going. No telling how long we have left. They could already be stealing the means to defeat us."

Zira replied, "Yes, we attack as soon as we arrive. Commanders, pass this on to your warriors. At the gallop, forward!"

• • •

Mike walked alongside Steve through the thick fog. She asked, "I sure picked a bad day to attend dinner with your family. It might be better if we found a phone and...oh god, tell me I'm seeing things."

Steve and Mike stopped walking as they stared off into space. They could barely see the edge of the ground two steps in front of them through the haze. In the distance, celestial bodies grew larger as they approached and then suddenly disappeared from sight as they shot past.

Steve said, "This must be why you were picking up pieces of your conversations from days ago. We're speeding through space faster than radio waves."

"Uh huh..."

"You going to be okay?" he asked.

"Uh, maybe. Sure looks like we're going to be late for dinner," she replied.

Steve said, "That's one way of looking at it. What I'd like to know is why this is happening and where we're going."

"I think we ought to go back inside for now. If nothing else, we can tell Miranda about what's happening," Mike said.

Steve said, "We should tell everyone. There's no telling what's going to happen next. It will be better for all of us if we stick together to face whatever we're up against."

"I have to agree with you about that. We should tell everyone. Maybe this will give some of the others something different to think about than

the loss of our hair.”

• • •

Miranda asked, “Did you forget something?” when she answered her door and saw Mike and Steve standing at the doorway in the light of her flashlight.

Steve said, “You better put some clothes on and come with us.”

“Am I invited now?” asked Miranda.

“Uh, we're not going. We can't,” Mike said.

Miranda said, “Then why should I get dressed if I'm not going anywhere?”

Steve said, “Okay, I guess this is going to sound crazy, but we're not on Earth anymore. That's what we want you to come and see for yourself. That's why we can't leave.”

Miranda stood looking at her two friends for signs of a practical joke. She finally said, “If this is a joke, it better be a good one. Let's go.”

Mike asked, “Aren't you going to get dressed?”

“What on Earth for? In this fog, no one can see anyone unless they're within three feet of each other with a candle. I've already tried looking out my window. It's just as thick outside as it is in here now. Of course, that kind of goes without saying since what's in here came from outside. Anyway, if you're telling the truth, then it doesn't really matter whether I'm dressed or not. Right? I'm surprised that you're not taking advantage of this.”

Steve said, “You know something? Miranda's right. Since we're technically not on Earth anymore, we really don't have to wear anything if we don't want to. Miranda, would you mind if I leave my clothes in your room in case I need them later?”

“You mean you're serious? We really aren't on Earth?” asked Miranda as Steve undressed right then.

“Steve? Are you sure we, I mean, you should do this?” asked Mike.

Steve answered, “I can't think of a single reason not to take advantage of our situation,” as he peeled off the last of his clothes. “Are you going to join us in being free?”

Mike replied, “Well, uh, I'm not sure. After all, the others might object to seeing us naked when we tell them we're in space.”

Steve replied, “It's not going to change the facts one iota whether we're dressed or not,” as he tossed his clothes into Miranda's room.

Miranda asked, "Are you going as you are or not, Mike? You're welcome to toss your clothes in my room if you want instead of climbing the stairs to your room. This is our first real chance to make a statement that we're not going to accept limits on our new freedom. I think it's really important that we not lose this chance. Please stand with us."

Mike asked, "Is it really that important that we make a stand now?"

Miranda answered, "Yes, it is. If we state now that we won't accept limitations on our rights, the others will have no choice but to give in. We can't let them establish the same old restrictions just because everyone was afraid on Earth to stand up for their rights."

Steve asked, "Miranda, didn't you say that there are some other nudists here? If we're going to make a stand, they might want to join us."

Miranda said, "Yes! There are others. We really should get them to stand with us. You two wait here while I find them."

As Miranda left, Mike looked at Steve. He wasn't saying anything more to persuade her. It was clear to her that he'd stated his case and was leaving it up to her to decide. Mike finally said, "If the others are here and decide to see space while naked, I'll strip, too. Fair enough?"

Steve said, "It's always your decision to make. That's part of our credo. You know that we don't force others to go naked. We only want the right to do so ourselves. That's why I can't argue with whatever you decide to do. I'll accept whatever you decide for yourself as fair."

• • •

Miranda returned several minutes later with two women equally naked as herself. Mike quickly undressed and threw her clothes into Miranda's room before walking downstairs with the others. When they reached the lobby, their lack of clothes weren't noticed until they were close enough to other students. Then the lobby grew somewhat hushed in tone as more women saw them briefly before they reached the front door and left.

One woman said, "I could have sworn there was a naked man with them."

"I'd like to know what they're up to. Are they staging a protest today?"

"Not that I know of. Still, this could be interesting. Let's follow them."

• • •

Miranda stared off into space beside her friends. None of them said anything. Nothing needed to be said about where they were as they all

wondered inside their minds about what would happen next.

Even some of the women who followed them out from the lobby were stunned by the spectacle of space only feet away from them while forgetting that four women and a man were standing naked near them. They also forgot that everyone was hairless. After a short while, Connie, who was dressed only in a robe, let it slip from her shoulders to fall to the ground as she stepped over beside her friends to stand in unity with them.

Miranda said, "Thanks, Connie, for joining us."

Another woman picked up the robe and offered it back to Connie.

Connie said, "Thanks," as she accepted it, then wadded and threw it out toward space. It unfolded and hung briefly in sight before it slowly fell behind and eventually passed out of sight.

Miranda said, "Well, that pretty much proves it. You can't do that on Earth."

• • •

The Lizzar Chief of Commanders demanded, "How much longer must we wait?"

"Not long, sire. You won't have to wait much longer. We had a very strong signal during the first part of the operation."

• • •

Debra asked, "Why are you standing here without any clothes on? Aren't you worried about the campus police?"

Connie turned and said, "You better move closer, Debra, and take a look. We're not on Earth anymore. All the old rules are gone now. If you want to be nude now, you can. We're making a statement that we're not going to let our freedom to live as we want be repressed anymore. Will you join us?"

"This is a protest?" asked Debra.

Connie said, "No, it's not a protest. We're making a statement of freedom. From now on, we have the right to be naked whenever we want. Can't you see where we are now? We're cut off from Earth. That makes this the best and most perfect time to tell everyone how you feel. If you don't grab the freedom you're entitled to, then you'll possibly never get the chance."

"We're all we have left of Earth. This is our chance to start a new society. We can eliminate most of the mistakes our parents and their

parents made. We're like the religious disciples of old. They went around naked so people would know who they were. The bible never made nudity out to be evil or bad. That was done by power hungry individuals eager to control people, not by god," Mike said.

Miranda said, "Well, Debra, you said you wanted to visit a nudist club and experience the lifestyle. The problem now is that we don't have any clubs to go to anymore. The only way you can experience that lifestyle is to seize control of your life and do what you want. If you want to be naked, then do it. Don't complain later if someone says you can't do something because you failed to make your desires known. Anyway, the decision is now yours to make. Be naked if you want or remain dressed. Either way, you won't hear us criticizing you for your choice. All we're asking is that you not criticize us for exercising our rights."

Connie said, "I even threw my robe out into space to show how strongly I feel about what we're expressing. If I have to, I'll go back inside, gather up all my clothes, and bring them out here so I can ditch everyone of those as well."

Miranda said, "I like that idea. That's probably the best way for us to show just how committed we are about living our lives naked. I'll be back shortly. I'm going to get my clothes and toss them into orbit."

Steve turned and said, "Bring mine with you! I'd like to give mine a good toss, too!"

Miranda replied, "Sure thing, Steve. You want me to check your pockets first?"

"I don't think I have much in them that's worth anything, but you may. Thanks," Steve replied.

Connie and Miranda hurried away from near the edge where they had been staring out into space with their friends. Debra stood staring at Mike, two other women she knew, and Steve whom she didn't know but couldn't help staring at when he turned to speak with Miranda. Even though the lack of hair on everyone seemed to give everyone a gross appearance that instantly caught the eye, she couldn't help but stare between his legs occasionally.

Steve noticed where Debra was staring. He ignored her lack of nudist etiquette since she hadn't joined the ranks yet.

Debra finally realized that Steve saw her looking at him. She blushed slightly, then said, "I'm sorry. I couldn't help but notice. You might not believe this, but I've seen some men before. However, they didn't have testicles as large. Have you been injured lately?"

Steve replied, "No, they're this big normally. I'm a bit used to people staring briefly. You caught me off guard or I would have ignored your staring for so long."

Debra said, "I'm beginning to feel like I wouldn't have made a good nudist on Earth."

"Nonsense. No one's perfect. I'll even admit that I've looked at women before and admired them, though I usually mentally dress them to make them sexier."

"Mentally dress them? I don't understand," she replied.

Steve said, "Clothes were partly invented to make people sexier in appearance. By dressing, people often make a statement that they're available. The first people to wear clothes did so for valid reasons. To keep warm, to show unity, to show leadership. However, they discovered that they could mystify the body by doing so and make it sexier looking. Did you know that there are still some tribes on Earth today that don't wear any clothes? They're among the few groups of people without over-population problems. Primitive or early women, men too, often dressed to show their availability. Otherwise, they often went about naked as they were more comfortable that way unless the weather was inclement. They didn't do things, such as dressing up, without reasons that were valid to them. So, when you walk around in clothes, you're actually saying that you agree with the traditional reasons for dressing and are, in a sense, available. Right now, I see no reason to wear anything. It's not cold, I don't belong to any army, and I'm not a leader. Nor am I looking for companionship of a sexual nature."

Debra said, "How do I know all these things you say are true?"

He answered, "Well, you don't. Not now, anyway. All you have left now is your own common sense. You could have researched it yourself in the campus library if we were still on Earth. Anyway, I figure that wherever we wind up, any clothes we take along aren't going to last very long. Even those people here who don't subscribe to the nudist philosophy are going to be naked once their clothes wear out, whether they like it or not. After all, it's not very likely that we'll find clothing stores lined up waiting for us whenever we reach our destination. What's more likely is we're going to find ourselves having to adjust to completely new situations."

Debra said, "I have to admit what you're saying about our clothes wearing out is probably true. Still, why should I go naked now?"

Steve answered, "Only because you want to be naked or because you want to be used to nudity before you have no choice in the matter. The

biggest advantage right now is that you have the choice. You don't have to throw your clothes away like I'm doing. If you go naked now, you can still change your mind later and dress. It's not up to me or anyone else to convince you. All I'm doing is answering your questions and giving you what facts I possess. It's still your decision and I'll respect it, regardless of what you decide."

"I've heard that line before, only it was to do with still having respect in the morning."

"I respect you already because you have the courage to confront the situation and ask questions. Whatever you decide isn't going to change that. Now or in the morning."

She asked, "Are you sure you're not just trying to get me out of my clothes so you can stare back at me for staring at you?"

"If you want, I won't even look in your direction. I'm certainly not trying to get back at you for staring."

Debra said, "I was trying to be funny. I didn't mean to make it sound otherwise."

Steve said, "Uh, I misunderstood. No problem, then."

"I think I'll go get most of my clothes to toss over the side, too. This is too important a time for me not to make a real commitment," said Mike.

Debra asked, "Why only most of your clothes?" before Mike could walk very far.

Mike turned and said, "Well, I'm going to keep a few for when I want to appear sexy."

Debra said, "Do you...?"

"Do I what?" asked Mike.

Debra replied, "Never mind. You already answered that you think this is important. Hold up, I'm coming along with you."

• • •

Over Commander Zira ordered, "Halt! We'll not attack until they land whatever they've stolen from Earth. I will not waste warriors needlessly."

Dennis nodded and used his binoculars to stare at the far off Lizzars who had yet to learn of their presence. Even if the Lizzars spotted the force, he knew it would do them little good since they were far out of range and much too mobile.

• • •

Debra carried a load of clothing out of the dormitory as she followed Miranda, Connie, and Mike who each had their arms full of more clothing. They slowly made their way through the thick as soup fog until they found Steve and the other two women who still stood watching the universe go by.

Connie dropped her bundle, took several clothing items, wadded them into a ball, tossed them into space, and then hollered, "I am free! I'll not be repressed anymore!"

"Freedom!" shouted Miranda as she threw some of her clothing out over the edge.

"Here Steve. I've got your clothes. We kept everyone's shoes and socks for now," Mike said.

"Thanks, Mike," he said as he took his clothing. He tossed them out, shouting, "I'm free!"

Debra staggered close to the edge before dropping her rolled up bundle of clothing, revealing herself to be wearing only a robe. She stepped back and then kicked the bundle hard enough to send it out over the edge. "Now with my robe, I join you in seeking total freedom." She pulled the belt loose permitting it to open, showing that she was quite naked beneath it. Debra slipped the robe down from her shoulders and let it fall down to her elbows as she turned to face the others. Then she let it fall completely to the ground. She turned back toward it and kicked it outward into space while her nude and non-nude friends watched.

Miranda said, "Anyone who wants to join us in creating a new society with complete equality and freedom of expression is welcome to join us. You don't even have to get naked to join. We're accepting anyone who's willing to let others express themselves in any manner that doesn't harm others."

"What if I find your nudity offensive? Isn't that harming me?" a woman not far from her asked.

Miranda said, "No, it's not harming you. Lots of things are offensive without causing harm. Learn the difference."

The woman said, "What's to protect me from being raped by that creep standing with you?"

Miranda said, "The same sense of respect he held for you while he was dressed. He's also not a creep. Besides, I've never heard of a rapist who cared whether he or his victim wore clothes. Or do you think you're so overpoweringly beautiful that he won't be able to resist raping you?"

The woman replied, "If too many women undress in front of him, he

might lose his self-control. Every man is a rapist at heart."

Miranda said, "I doubt if you could even arouse him by undressing in front of him. However, if he does try to rape you or anyone else, I'll personally help you or whoever it is to cut his balls off."

Steve remained silent though he wished they wouldn't talk about such things as castrating him. He felt strangely alone among all the women. Then he remembered that he was the only man. As far as he knew, there were no other men upon the small section of stolen Earth.

"So will I, though I don't think that will prove necessary. He was in my room alone with me yesterday while we were both naked. Steve didn't make the slightest move or suggestion toward me. If he can resist me, I know that he can easily resist you," Mike said.

Debra said, "I don't think you have the courage to find out whether he will or not. You're just all mouth and no show."

The woman replied, "Yeah?"

Debra said, "You heard me. I don't suffer from a speech impediment."

The woman said, "Well, I'm not throwing my clothes away."

Debra said, "No one asked you to do that."

Steve said, "I think we're getting carried away here. Remember, we don't go around forcing our lifestyle onto others. All we're asking is that others respect our rights to live our lives in a natural state. Don't force her into undressing just to prove she has the courage to be naked. That's not our style. We have to respect her preference for clothing just as we expect her to respect our right to be nude. Otherwise, our new society will mean nothing and revert back to what exists on Earth. Lady, you don't have to undress to prove anything."

The woman exclaimed, "I sure don't need you to defend me, either, Mister."

Steve said, "I wasn't defending you. All I did was remind my friends that we don't force our lifestyle onto others. I could hardly care less about whether you stay dressed or not. That's your business, not mine. I do care, however, about whether you're willing to join us in remodeling society."

"So you can be king?" she asked.

Steve said, "What? Do you really think I'm trying to take over this new society we're forming? Boy, have you got a lot of learning to accomplish. We just stated that everyone is to be equal. We're trying to create a true democracy, not a monarchy. Whoever's elected as our leader will have my full support so long as she lives up to defending all our rights at all times."

The woman asked, "Just what do you consider your rights?"

Steve said, "Basically about the same as most people, I imagine. I want the right to be free, with freedom of speech, movement, worship, press, lifestyle, and so forth. I want my vote to be the same as anyone else's. I want a government that's not oppressive or repressive. I don't think I'm being unreasonable about what I want for myself and others."

"Hear, hear! I can go along with that!" Mike exclaimed.

Steve added, "Besides which, we all know that sooner or later, we're going to arrive somewhere. Personally, I'll feel better about us if we're united by common rights enjoyed by all of us without exception regardless of our race, creeds, gender, or any other individual traits since we don't know what we'll encounter. I know that if we're united in the spirit of freedom, we'll be more likely to survive whatever we face."

Miranda said, "Steve's just brought out a good point. We don't know what lies ahead. We better get ourselves organized quickly since we don't know how long we have before we have to face another change in our situation."

The woman said, "Now that's the first real sense any of you have made so far. I can agree with you on being organized. Are you really committed to honoring everything you all have said?"

Steve and the women beside him quickly said yes.

The woman said, "Okay, I guess I can tolerate you all being naked if you live up to your ideals. I'm with you in spirit, at least, so let's get ourselves organized."

• • •

"I think I see them coming down from the sky!" Dennis hollered.

Zira nodded as he put down his binoculars. He said, "It's almost time for our battle, then."

Dennis asked, "Do you think the Lizzars have spotted us yet?"

Zira put his binoculars to his eyes and stared out at the distant Lizzars. He saw no difference in their formations. "No, I think not. We shall proceed with our plan once the new piece of Earth is on the ground. I should think that the Lizzars intend to place it in the middle of their troops."

Dennis said, "In that case, we better send the vehicles through their formation to reach our people before they're killed. We must learn what technology is present with them so we won't have to waste time searching."

Zira said, "I agree. You should lead your vehicles in while we engage

the Lizzars in battle.”

• • •

Mike shouted, “Hey everyone! The fog is lifting! Maybe we'll be able to see something outside now!”

A woman shouted, “I see blue skies! Maybe we're back on Earth!”

Another shouted, “It could have been a government experiment!”

The women and one man rushed out of the dormitory lobby. Outside the building, they hurried over to the edge of what was left of their world.

Another woman said, “We're definitely slowing down! I think we're landing somewhere, too!”

“I can see land beneath us!”

“So can I!”

“It doesn't look like Earth.”

“How can you be sure?”

“See any airplanes? There ought to be something in the air.”

“She's right! I don't see any roads or buildings down there. If this is Earth, where are all the roads and buildings?”

“Hey, everyone! Over this way! I can see one building! It looks almost like a castle! It's got a high wall like one!”

The women who couldn't see the castle ran over to where the other woman was pointing. They looked down at the still distant structure.

Steve looked at it with recognition as he remembered the strange disappearance only days before of a women's prison. “That's not a castle. That's the missing prison from Earth.”

“The missing prison? Will we be safe?”

“The guards ought to still be in control.”

“Then we'll be safe?”

Steve noticed that they were heading in the general direction of the prison, but not exactly at it. He guessed then that they'd land nearby. Suspecting conditions might not be optimum, he said, “I'd like to suggest to everyone that we go back into the dormitory and arm ourselves in case any of the prisoners escaped.”

As some of the women turned to walk toward the dormitory, he caught his first sight of the Lizzar troops though they appeared only to be a circular blotch on the plain below as if marking the center of a target. Not knowing that he was seeing intelligent life, he turned and hurried to the dormitory with his friends, nine of whom were now as nude as himself.

Steve felt somewhat better when three more women joined the original group in being nude by throwing away their clothes after overhearing much of what was said earlier. As well, he could sense in the voices of several more women that they were on the borderline of dispensing with their own clothing, though his group would still be a minority. Still, it would be a strong minority.

Chapter 5

Dennis said, "Jim, your primary objective is still to reach the prison armory. The rest of the vehicles will head for whatever piece of Earth the Lizzars bring in so we can save lives and keep the Lizzars from any technology there. The centaurs will fight the Lizzar troops. They'll try to keep them busy and off our backs. Remember, we have reinforcements coming, so don't worry about the odds too much for now."

"Uh, right. I'll just forget that they outnumber us by about four to one," Jim replied.

Dennis said, "It's more like eight to one, in case you're interested."

"Oh, it's only eight to one? Gee, that should make it all right, then," Jim replied.

Dennis said, "Trust me. We've been up against worse odds before. This won't be as bad as those battles."

• • •

Steve looked around the lobby for a suitable weapon while nearly all the women raced to the stairs to reach their rooms. He considered taking a chair and breaking it to use one of the legs as a club, but the only wooden chair he saw wasn't really wood. It was wicker. Nearly everything else was plastic and metal. Even the tables were the cheaply made metal and formica style found in countless places.

• • •

Mike reached her room a lot quicker than she last left it as she didn't have to almost blindly feel her way around in fog. She ran inside, surprised to see that she had missed tossing away some other clothes besides the

slinky lingerie she wanted to save. She ignored those as she hurried to her dresser drawer and rummaged around her socks until she found the one that was oddly shaped and heavy. Without removing it from the sock, she took her pistol out of the drawer, relieved to have something she could actually defend herself with against any escaped convicts. She debated about taking another sock with spare ammunition momentarily, then decided that her revolver's six bullets would have to be enough.

• • •

Miranda reached into her purse and withdrew her stun gun. It wasn't much, but it could give her and the others plenty of time to tie up whoever might threaten them without having to kill. She knew it was a popular choice among the women though pepper spray was a close second. She chose the stun gun simply because she knew it could be used inside a car while on a date if someone got too rambunctious. She was thankful that hadn't yet been necessary, though she had limited her dating mostly to young male nudists her age whom she felt were simply more respectful of women in general. As well, she knew they generally weren't after her pussy if they suggested going skinny dipping at a secluded beach.

• • •

Zira shouted, "They're almost down! Charge!"

The cars leaped out ahead of the centaur cohorts while the APC raced just barely ahead of the centaurs. The cars soon left the rest of the force far behind as they charged in a line formation behind the modified ramming car that would clear a path through the Lizzar troops for them to drive upon. It was difficult to tell at first that any of the allied human-centaur units had different goals as they were all headed in the same direction.

As the centaur cohorts galloped toward the Lizzars, the warriors gradually spread out into line formations. Many of them carried bows and grasped arrows ready to nock against their bowstrings and fire once they were in range. A few carried shotguns or rifles at the ready.

Dennis gripped the edge of the car roof with both hands as he stood and stared intently ahead. His rifle was grasped by a few fingers of one hand so he could pull it up into use when the time came. Behind him in the other cars, more of his friends rode standing with their upper torsos exposed through the openings in their cars' roofs. The women driving their cars followed the lead car carefully and closely as the lead driver was

responsible for avoiding any terrain that might cause an accident.

• • •

Steve was still looking around for anything suitable as a weapon when he felt the ground beneath him shudder as vibrations shook the dormitory. He was almost thrown to the floor. He only gradually became aware that something was happening outside as sounds filtered in. He ran to the window nearest the edge and looked out while holding the curtains out of his way. Steve stood shocked at the sight of hundreds, if not thousands, of armed lizard warriors moving toward the dorm's island of dirt from Earth. He knew immediately that there was no way he and the women could hope to fight them off. To even attempt to do so would be a sure way of getting themselves hurt or killed. The only recourse he could see was to surrender while hoping the lizard warriors would accept them as prisoners and not just kill them out of hand. As he stared out the window, his thoughts wandered to whether they were responsible for what happened to him and the women. His only conclusion was that they were. Steve wondered what the lizard warriors wanted. Did they want slaves? The idea of seeing himself and the women shackled in chains and forced to labor made him shudder throughout his entire body. As well, he knew there was nothing he or the women could do about it under the circumstances. Steve tried to mentally prepare himself for what appeared to be the only outcome.

• • •

Miranda ran to the window just after the building settled on the plain as the shouts of people caught her attention. She stared out at the strange lizard-like beings waving swords and spears in the air as they moved toward the island of Earth she knew instinctively they were responsible for stealing. She let her stun gun fall to the floor, knowing that it was useless against so many armed warriors who all faced the dormitory.

She stared at them with disbelief. A sinking sense of despair was slowly taking over her body as she considered what would happen to her and the others. She knew it wouldn't much matter anymore about the freedoms they announced they were going to enjoy, not if those lizard-like warriors intended to carry them off as slaves. Tears formed in her eyes as she thought of herself being helplessly at the mercy of those warriors. Then she remembered that crying would do no good. She reached up and wiped her eyes before the tears could fall. When she glanced again at the

oncoming warriors, she was stunned to see another sight. A column of dust was streaking toward the back of the warriors at high speed.

• • •

Dennis spotted the Lizzar unit leader as his car smashed through the Lizzar unit. He quickly and smoothly aimed and fired at the Lizzar leader. The leader and several other Lizzar warriors fell from the high-powered bullet after having survived the ramming car's plunge into their unit's ranks. Ahead of Dennis, he saw Lizzar soldier after Lizzar soldier swept up and thrown outward by the angled ramming blades of his car. Few Lizzar troops were left standing near enough to swing at the car with their iron swords or jab at it with their spears. The few who tried to toss a spear at him usually missed him and hit another Lizzar on the other side.

He spotted another Lizzar unit leader and fired once more. He missed, but heard a second shot from a following car a moment later. He saw the Lizzar leader fall to the second shot and smiled at the thought that his force was confusing the enemy while drawing closer to the small patch of ground from Earth with a single building standing upon it.

• • •

Mike heard the shots and ran to her window in time to see the heavily modified cars plunge into the strange warriors who surrounded the dormitory. She stared at them as if mesmerized, noticing that the strange warriors used swords and spears while they appeared to be quite lizard-like in appearance. Incredibly, she watched as five cars drove through the warriors without stopping. Dozens of lizard warriors were tossed into the air to fall among their comrades. Others stopped and turned to face the menace. As the cars drew closer, she saw with a start that there were men with rifles or shotguns standing in the cars. Forgetting about the plight of the lizard warriors who she suddenly realized weren't friends, she immediately hoped that the men would reach her and the others in the dormitory. Instinctively, she removed her pistol from the sock before remembering that she had spare ammunition. She had to tear herself away from the window to retrieve the other sock with her supply of bullets.

• • •

Dennis's thoughts of becoming a slave were disrupted only moments later as he heard the first shots. He searched for the source of the shots

only to see no change in what lay before him. He realized then that the shots came from another direction. Reaching that conclusion, he left his window to seek out another with a different view while hoping that the shots might be from the guards at the prison whom he forgot about. If the guards were the ones firing, then he knew there was a slim chance to remain free if the two groups could reach each other.

• • •

Miranda felt like shouting when she saw that there were men in the cars as they rammed into the lizard warriors and then used guns on some of them. She restrained herself for only a minute until she just knew she had to shout. "Give it to them, guys! Teach them not to steal people from Earth!" she yelled after opening her window quickly.

She counted the cars and wondered if they could really do anything about the hundreds of lizard warriors in front of her. To her they seemed too few, yet they were so brave as they charged deep into the enemy warriors, knocking dozens of them into the air while shooting at others whom they picked out for some reason. As she thought about it, she realized that they must know how to spot the leaders.

• • •

Dennis waved the rest of the cars forward while his driver swerved away from the island of Earth to circle it and keep the Lizzars off guard.

The second car aimed at one of the ramps the Lizzars used to scale the slopes with and shot up onto the small piece of terra firma. As soon as it was on the flat upper surface of Earth soil, it drove on around the building. Another and another car followed until four of them were on Earth's soil once more as they slowly circled the lone building and watched for any Lizzar warriors who might reach it.

• • •

Miranda stared down at the men in astonishment to see that they were completely naked as they stood inside their cars with their guns at the ready while their cars slowly circled the building. She yelled down, "Give 'em hell!"

The man in the car looked up at her and his mouth dropped open. He hollered back, "Are you from Earth? I thought I heard you speak English!"

"Yes, we're from Earth, but it's a long story!" she shouted back as his

car slowly drove past.

He hollered, "Stay inside for now! We've got reinforcements on the way!"

She yelled back, "Thank goodness! I thought you were alone!"

• • •

Over Commander Zira shouted, "Circle the enemy! Use the Indian formation! Open fire!"

Around the surprised Lizzars, the centaur cohorts now rode in a single file in a counter-clockwise direction so most of them could fire their high-powered bows at the enemy who was now trapped between them and the cars in the center. Interspersed among the line of centaur warriors were a few centaurs with shotguns who watched for any sudden counter-attacks from the Lizzar troops to break out of the circle. Every centaur warrior knew they had to keep the enemy engaged until the prison armory was empty. Then they could change their tactics to save the people in the center.

• • •

Jim sighed with relief as the APC barreled up the slope to the prison. Angelica stopped the APC briefly at the building where the APC used to be stored. Pete and two female guards exited the rear hatch to enter the building in search of parts they would need. Then she drove off into the prison. While she and Jim stayed at the APC to guard it, Mitch led the rest inside toward the armory.

• • •

Andrea couldn't believe it when she heard the first shots coming from outside the prison. She had hidden in a cell on the top floor, hoping that the lizard people wouldn't search there for her. Now she stood and gazed out the window at the scene that was different than what she last saw. The lizard people were attacking another building that appeared to be from Earth. Cars were plowing through the lizard troops while men shot weapons at the enemy. Now she knew that she had to get out of the prison if she was to join them and escape. Even being their prisoner was better than being one to the lizard people whom she didn't understand. She eagerly left the cell and hurried through the corridors to the stairways, sometimes forgetting that some routes were still locked and barred. She backtracked as she corrected herself while hoping that she wasn't too late in finding her

way to the front door.

• • •

Mitch looked at the steel door with relief replacing the worry he had that the Lizzars might have succeeded in penetrating the armory already. He worked the combination slowly until he had the great steel door open. As soon as it was open, he and others scurried inside to grab everything they could. Nothing valuable as a weapon was to be left behind if at all possible. Anything they couldn't carry in or on the APC or hand over to centaurs would have to be placed on the concrete in front of it so the APC could drive over and crush it beyond usefulness. While Sasha stood on guard at the armory door, he and the others carried out weapons and ammunition.

• • •

Steve looked at the strange cars, heavily reinforced with metal plating, as they drove around the dormitory slowly. He went to the lobby door and stood in the doorway, hoping to find out what the situation was.

"Hey, you! Get your ass inside before one of the Lizzars splits you open with a spear!" a man hollered from the next passing car.

Steve yelled back, "What's going on?"

The man hollered, "The Lizzars are our enemies. They want to enslave everyone. They don't care if you're human or centaur."

Steve wondered if he heard the man right. He hollered back, "Did you say centaur?"

The man's car drove around the corner before Steve could get an answer. Steve waited for the next car to come around the other corner.

• • •

Mike looked at the rapidly changing situation in astonishment. She wasn't sure, but she thought she was seeing centaurs with bows and arrows circling the lizard people. She wasn't at all sure if she should fire her gun at the lizard people or the centaurs she thought she saw. However, realizing that the men in the cars were shooting and driving into the lizard people convinced her that the centaurs must be friendly. As well, she knew they were all well out of her range. Even getting a hit on either one of them at that range would be a miracle. Then she thought again about that. She could see that the density of lizard people gave her a target bigger than a

barn. She aimed at the center of the mass of lizard people and squeezed the trigger.

Blam! Her little revolver spit out a slug while gray-white smoke drifted from the barrel.

She looked at the mass of lizard troops and couldn't tell if she even hit one of them. She fired a second time.

Blam!

"Hey you up there! Quit wasting bullets! You don't shoot any of the Lizzars unless you know you can hit him and you're certain that he's a Lizzar leader!"

"Me?" Mike hollered back down at the man in the car yelling.

"Yeah! I mean you! Quit wasting fucking bullets!" he hollered back.

"I was only trying to help! Are those centaurs out there?"

"Yes and they're on our side! Don't you dare shoot them or I'll shoot you myself!"

"All right, already, I won't shoot anyone!"

• • •

Andrea tripped and slid across the concrete floor. The heavy iron sword she carried clanged once against the floor. Rather than concern herself with how scraped up she might be, despite how her chest hurt, she got back to her feet. Quickly, she made her way to another stairway, unsure if there'd be anyone besides the lizard people to greet her once she reached the front door. Nearing the stairway, she stubbed a toe and hobbled to the railing before making her way down another level. Except for the noise of her bare feet and when she tripped and fell, she made no noise for fear that one or more of the lizard people were still inside the prison.

She neared another window and heard an engine accompanied by the clanking of metal. She stopped, horrified in her thoughts as she tried to imagine what kind of terrible machine the lizard people might be using as the clanking sounded too much like their swords. She could scarcely forget the horror of seeing some women, who tried to fight back, chopped into pieces when the lizard people first attacked.

The group of prisoners she escaped from had no seriously wounded for those were hacked to death by the lizard people. Only the lightly wounded were permitted to live as their prisoners. A single beheading, followed by the same hacking apart, was all it took to convince everyone to go where the lizard people pointed. It wasn't like trying to deal with the guards they

once sneered at or tried to fool. It was either the lizard way or death.

Still, Andrea felt she had no choice as she continued down the stairs, hoping that she could slip by any lizard soldiers to reach the other people. Otherwise, Andrea was certain that she'd either die when she ran out of food and water or be captured again. Or, she suddenly realized, she might even surrender rather than prolong any suffering without food and water.

• • •

Steve asked, "Do you have centaurs on this world?" as the next car slowly rounded the building corner.

Without facing him, the man hollered back, "You bet we do and they're our allies! You can kill all the Lizzars you want, but don't harm any centaurs!"

Steve shouted, "I'd like to help fight, but I don't have a weapon!"

The man said, "Honey, toss him something to fight with."

The car door opened, revealing a beautiful, stark-naked, teenage girl. She tossed out a sword that clanged against the steps.

The man shouted, "Use that if any Lizzars reach the building! Keep everyone inside until it's safe!"

Steve hollered, "Thanks!" before he picked up the sword.

• • •

Andrea stopped suddenly. She listened carefully, then sighed with relief when she realized she was hearing human voices and not the lispy sounding voices of the lizard people. Then she quietly walked toward the voices.

She went about twenty feet when she heard something else. The sound sent shivers up and down her spine. She was glad that she hadn't said anything out loud moments before when she heard the human voices for the new voices weren't human. She hurried as quietly as possible to warn the others, whoever they were, that there were lizard soldiers in the prison.

• • •

Over Commander Zira stood outside the circling cohorts. "These new tactics work as well as we hoped they would."

Commander Haro replied, "I'm glad that we were given the best known tactics used by Earth's greatest cavalry. Still, I find it hard to believe that humans rode around on beasts that only resemble us from the waist down

while fighting other humans at the same time. They appear so puny in comparison to the beasts they controlled."

Zira said, "I'm seriously considering Jim's idea that some humans be teamed up with our scouts in cavalry-like manner. He has a good argument that such a combination will permit both individuals to see more and fight better. I must admit that having an extra set of eyes to watch behind while we watch where we're going could be an advantage. As well, he's right about humans being able to stand on our backs and increase how far we can scout visually. Tell me, do you like these ideas?"

"Sir, I can only suggest that we give them a try. So far, there has been no cause to regret our alliance with the humans. They have done everything they promised," Haro answered.

"Still, I can't help but remember that the humans have admitted that they don't always keep their promises."

"Sir, we're not perfect, either."

• • •

Andrea spotted the shadows just before she saw one of the guards. Almost the same time, she realized the lizard people were close behind her, not concerned with whether they could be heard or not. She whirled about in time to see the lizard soldiers come around an intersection into the corridor she was in. Out of desperation, she yelled, "Watch out! They're in here!"

Angelica heard the call almost at the same time that she realized she wasn't alone. She turned toward the source and peered into the dim corridor while she held her pistol at the ready.

Andrea backed up as the lizard soldiers approached her. She then remembered the sword she held. She lifted the heavy iron weapon over her right shoulder using both hands. As one lizard soldier came almost within reach, she swung at him.

The sword flew out of her unpracticed hands, missing him completely and striking another lizard soldier behind him. The wounded lizard soldier cried out in pain while bullets suddenly filled the air.

"Drop down to the floor!" Angelica shouted as she tried to aim at the Lizzar threatening the woman.

Andrea barely understood the instruction as she dodged the lizard soldier's swing at her with his sword. She tripped and fell on her ass. Her gaze saw the lizard soldier drawing back to behead her when more bullets

flew past her like speeding bees. The lizard warrior staggered and fell back from her, his sword falling to clank against the floor.

"Crawl toward me while I cover you. Stay low so I can keep them away from us," Angelica said.

• • •

Steve watched the Lizzar come over the edge just after one of the cars went around the corner. The Lizzar saw Steve and charged with his sword. Steve drew back and swung only to hit the top of the doorway. His sword stuck in the wood molding. With no time to force his sword free, Steve released the sword and backed up as the Lizzar entered the dorm. The Lizzar appeared to have a sneer on his face as he drew his arm back to stab forward into Steve.

A bullet unexpectedly penetrated the Lizzar in the forehead. The Lizzar fell at Steve's feet. Steve turned and stared at Mike holding a gun in her hand. "Where'd you get that?" he asked

"My father felt I should have something more lethal than a stun gun or pepper spray. I came down to see if anyone was guarding the front door."

"I'm certainly glad your father thought so well of you. Thanks," he said before picking up the dead Lizzar's sword.

"I also got tired of the men outside telling me not to waste bullets unless I knew I could hit what I was shooting at," she said.

"That clearly wasn't a wasted bullet," Steve said.

• • •

Andrea whispered, "Thanks, I owe you."

Angelica fired off two more rounds as Mitch came up beside her and added his firepower to hers. While he kept watch, she reloaded. Angelica asked, "You been hiding since we were first attacked?"

"No, they took me prisoner, but I escaped. Another inmate, Kelly, covered me with sand at night. I waited a few hours after they left before I uncovered myself and made it back here the next night for food and water. I've been in hiding since then. What's happening? Do you know?" Andrea replied.

Angelica answered, as she fired off another shot at a Lizzar, "Those lizard soldiers are the Lizzars. They're trying to enslave everyone they come into contact with. They've invented a tractor beam and are using it to steal pieces of Earth so they can get hold of human technology. Apparently they

made a technology leap past a lot of things that we went through inventing step by step. That's why we're beating them now. Our presence changed the outcome of their war when the centaurs found the first people from Earth before the Lizzars."

"Centaur?" asked Andrea.

Angelica fired another shot, hitting a Lizzar in the leg. "Yes, this world has centaurs. They're now our allies. They're also willing to let us live here with all the freedom we're used to having since they don't have the technology to send us home. However, the only way for us to obtain that is to help them defeat the Lizzars. Until that happens, we're not going anywhere."

"Couldn't they give you some clothes?" asked Andrea.

As Mitch reloaded, Angelica said, "They don't have the technology to make clothes. Besides they don't have any need for them. We talked with some of the people who escaped from Conway, the first place the Lizzars took from Earth. What happened to our clothes also happened to most of theirs. However, the centaurs couldn't get Conway's people past the Lizzar lasers while they were dressed, so the centaurs forced them to strip. When the people got back to their town, the Lizzars had taken most of the clothing."

"If you want to leave with us, get off your ass and help carry the weapons out to the APC. Otherwise, we'll leave you. You can learn the rest of what's happening later," Mitch said.

Andrea said, "Yes, I'll help. I don't want to be left behind," as she scrambled around the steel door into the armory.

When Andrea was safely out of hearing while carrying a load of weapons to the APC, Mitch said, "I hope we can trust her. I'd sure hate to have to kill her."

Angelica asked, "Why? Because she's pretty?"

"That's one reason. However, I'm more concerned about us having enough of our own to make a go of surviving here if we find we can't ever return to Earth. Or haven't you noticed that's one of the most often discussed topics after tactics and going home?"

"Yeah, I've heard some of the talk about possibly having to settle here. It's not an easy subject to discuss. Some of us feel that all the women should be willing to become pregnant, even if they have to share a man with more than one other woman. Personally, I'm not against sex, but I'm not sure I can handle sharing a husband because I have to."

Mitch said, "I can see that you don't necessarily subscribe to sharing

everything."

Angelica said, "I'm not even sure I ever want to become pregnant. It wasn't in my original plans for my life. Now I'm faced with choices I never expected and don't particularly like. Is that so hard to understand?"

"For some of us, I guess it is. For others, I'm sure they understand all too well. Anyway, none of this has to be decided yet. For the time being, our only efforts should be to see that as many of us survive as is possible. Agreed?"

She answered, "Agreed."

• • •

Miranda walked down the stairs and went over to stand beside Steve and Mike at the doorway. She glanced at the gun in Mike's hand after noticing the dead Lizzar in the lobby. She said, "Someone ought to take out the trash."

"Later when it's safer," Mike said.

Steve handed Miranda a sword, having retrieved his from the doorway. He said, "Be careful where you swing these things. If it wasn't for Mike, I'd be dead now."

"He got his sword stuck over the door when he tried to stop that dead Lizzar," Mike said.

Miranda said, "Now I think I understand."

Steve said, "Here come two more over the edge!"

Mike aimed at the Lizzars only to see a car hit them both before she could fire. The two Lizzars bounced off the car into a tumble of legs and arms before toppling off the edge.

Mike said, "We've been talking to them as they pass by. They want to know how many of us are in the dorm. You want to get a count, Miranda?"

"Don't forget the technology. They want to know if there are any books that show how to make things. Also anything that can be used as a weapon. We either have to take everything with us or destroy it," Steve said.

"Books?" asked Miranda.

"Yes, books. They're teaching the centaurs how to read and make weapons for their defense. I also found out that they're all naked for a damn good reason. You ought to pass along to everyone that they can leave their clothes behind. They won't be needing those," Mike said.

Steve said, "They might have to travel through a laser zone. If that

happens, then they'll have to strip and cover themselves with a protective gel. If they leave their clothes here, we might be able to recover those later. That's their recommendation."

Miranda said, "I never thought I'd see the day where being naked was the only way to go. I'll get a count, find out about any books, and tell everyone that they should get naked."

"We'll also have to take my radio with us. It's desperately needed. I'll be up to help pack it later," Mike said.

• • •

Over Commander Zira ordered, "Send a detachment over to the prison for more weapons."

Commander Haro asked, "May I lead it myself? I'd like to see what an Earth prison looks like."

Zira nodded, then said, "Be careful, Haro. We need your experience."

• • •

Miranda said, "They're not happy about having to strip, even though they've all seen down into the cars and saw that the men were naked. We've got forty-two women and one man. Steve, you could have been made real happy if our destination hadn't been like this."

Steve said, "I don't think I'm up to that much happiness."

Miranda said, "Well, you'd have to be eventually. I even walked in on one woman using her vibrator while she watched the battle out her window. Sooner or later, those batteries are going to give out."

"Miranda's got a point there. Some of the liberated women are into having sex. Personally, I don't think this is going to change them any," Mike said.

Steve said, "I hope they're going to be ready for what's going to happen eventually."

Miranda asked, "What's going to happen?"

Mike answered, "Harry is going to contact the centaurs to have them carry us out of here on their backs. There isn't enough room in the cars for us because of their weapons and extra fuel tanks."

Miranda exclaimed, "We're going to ride centaurs? What a gas! Do we get a choice about male or female centaurs?"

"I don't think so. Right now, they're emptying the prison armory of extra weapons they need even more than my radio. As soon as they have those,

they're going to charge the Lizzars and break through to us so we can leave," Mike said.

Steve said, "Mike's going in a car because she knows how to care for the radio. The rest of us have to ride centaurs."

"Truthfully, they don't want to risk losing me since I know how to repair radios," Mike said.

Miranda asked, "Is it that dangerous on a centaur?"

Steve said, "It's because they'll have to fight their way back out with us on their backs. It's not going to be easy for them or us. Here comes our car with more information."

Harry shouted, "If anyone's centaur is wounded and falls, they're to keep moving and not stay with the wounded centaur! We don't have any means of carrying wounded centaurs back!"

Miranda exclaimed, "But that's barbaric!"

Steve said, "Maybe it is, but I think he's right."

• • •

Commander Haro galloped up the slope of the prison grounds with his small detachment of twenty centaurs. Upon reaching the top, they spotted several Lizzars making for the prison. Haro ordered, "Charge!"

His force ran at the Lizzars. The centaurs' spears and swords flailed away at the surprised Lizzars who fell to the sides as his force fought their way through. Haro fired his shotgun at the Lizzar leader, hitting him and several others. Another centaur stabbed the fallen Lizzar leader in the face. The Lizzar leader was left on the ground with a spear impaled in his skull while the centaur used his sword to decapitate another Lizzar who was too close for comfort. Stabbing and slashing, the centaurs broke through the Lizzars to reach the prison gates and race to the front steps where the APC was being loaded.

Jim spotted Commander Haro. He shouted, "Over here! We've got more rifles and ammunition!"

Haro reached the APC at the top of the steps while most of his force remained at the base to face any Lizzars who came through the gates. Haro stared at her for a moment and then said, "I don't remember seeing her before," as he accepted several weapons to pass on to another warrior.

"She was one of the inmates. She escaped from the Lizzars and came back here to hide," Jim said.

Haro asked the obvious, "Can she be trusted?"

"Given her choices, I think we can trust her. Anyway, she prefers us to the Lizzars," Jim said.

Haro asked, "Do you have room in your APC to carry her?"

Jim answered, "Not after we load everything inside."

Haro said, "In that case, I'll have a strong warrior ready to carry her. Instruct her on how to behave."

"I'll do that. Glad to see you. It's getting bad inside, too. Some of the Lizzars are coming in from the back of the building, but we've got them blocked from reaching the armory," Jim said.

"That's good. I'd like to see the insides of your prison," Haro replied.

Jim said, "I don't mind if you do, but now isn't a good time. How's the rest of the battle going?"

"We're running low of everything. We'd soon have to fight them with spears and swords, if not for these," Haro replied.

"Use them in good health. The armory's almost empty. Got enough now?" Jim asked.

"It seems so. Stay well, yourself. Detachment, form up to return!"

Commander Haro went down the steps with his hands full while his detachment readied themselves to run the gauntlet once more. Haro hollered out, "Charge!"

• • •

Andrea saw Angelica and Mitch about to be overwhelmed by Lizzars. Mitch was trying to reload while Angelica had too many targets to shoot them all at one time. Mitch stopped reloading and ducked a sword, then blocked another with his pistol. Andrea stooped down and picked up a sword from a fallen Lizzar. She gripped it tighter than she did before as she swung with it. Her sword connected with the shoulder of the Lizzar trying to kill Mitch. The Lizzar fell to the floor while his blood spurted out like a geyser. Then Angelica finished shooting the last Lizzar still facing them.

Mitch said, "Thanks. You saved my life."

"I never killed anyone before. Is he dead?" she replied.

Angelica asked, "Weren't you in prison for murder?"

Mitch said, "Yes, he's dead."

Andrea answered, "Yes, but I didn't do it."

"I believe you. Mitch, I think we ought to trust her with a gun," Angelica replied.

Andrea asked, "Will you show me how to use it? I really don't know

how.”

Mitch said, “Get her a gun and show her how to use it while I hold off the Lizzars.”

• • •

As she hurried inside the dormitory, Mike said, “Okay, I’ll get the radio now. Miranda, you better tell everyone to come down to the lobby so they can get their rides.”

Steve said, “I’ll help you with the radio.”

“Thanks, I can use the assistance,” Mike said.

• • •

Over Commander Zira ordered, “Sub-commander Theo! Take your force to the center and bring back the people and any technology they have. Commander Haro, force open a path through the enemy. Keep it open until Theo’s force leaves.”

Commander Haro said, “Over Commander, I promised that we’d also send some warriors back to the prison to carry some of them away. They don’t have enough room inside the APC for everyone.”

Zira said, “Then send some warriors back to the prison. You have your assignments. Good luck.”

Commander Haro called out, “Rone, take four warriors with you to the prison! Pick up the people who need a ride and carry them back to camp! First Cohort! Assemble on me!”

Theo was shouting, “Second Cohort, assemble on me!”

Within two minutes, Commander Haro shouted, “Charge!” His cohort moved forward in a wedge formation at the encircled Lizzars to force open a path for the Second Cohort to pass through.

“Second Cohort, forward!” Theo ordered.

• • •

Harry’s car stopped at the door to the dorm. He stepped out of the back door as Mike and Steve came forward with the shortwave radio. “When you get in, just keep down. Don’t bother shooting any Lizzars unless they get on the car and poke their heads through the roof opening. Otherwise, you could have a bullet ricochet off the outer plates back at you.”

Mike put part of the radio inside and got into the car. Steve passed more of the set to her before Harry closed the door.

Mike stood up and asked, "Aren't you getting back in?"

"Not enough room. I'll ride back with the others," Harry replied.

Steve looked at his first centaur up close as some of them came up the ramps the Lizzars shoved against the slope leading to the dorm. The centaur stared at him as well.

Harry said, "They lost their hair, Theo."

"Is that why they're different?" Theo asked.

Harry said, "That's all it is. Ready to load?"

Theo said, "Yes, we want to get them out of here as quickly as possible before we run out of ammunition completely."

Harry said, "Okay, line up your warriors. I'll get the people organized."

• • •

Miranda held on tightly to the female centaur she was assigned to. She couldn't believe that she was holding onto her practically by her breasts. It seemed wrong in Miranda's mind, yet the centaur said nothing about where Miranda gripped her. As the centaur galloped through the Lizzars, Miranda felt like she was going to have an orgasm.

Near her, Steve held onto another female centaur in much the same manner, though he tried not to grip the female centaur's breasts. Still, he had little choice as he was bounced around on her back and was forced to grasp her wherever he could.

Miranda asked, "How are you doing, Steve?"

"I'm in agony!" he cried out.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

He gasped out, "This hurts! I wish I had on a jock strap."

She said, "I'm sorry about that. Just hang on. We don't want to lose you."

"Not as sorry as I am," he replied.

Harry said, "Cross your ankles behind you, Steve, and sit back on them slightly. That will give you some relief, but you have to hold on tighter with your arms or you'll bounce off."

Steve asked, "Did we get everyone out?"

Harry replied, "Yes, we had more than enough warriors to carry everyone. Just hang on for now. We won't have to endure this for very long."

Steve cried out, "I hope not."

Miranda asked, "Is anyone else getting an orgasm?"

A couple of women replied yes.

Miranda said, "Steve, if you're up to it, I might want you when we get to camp."

"What?" he exclaimed.

Miranda said, "I'm getting hornier by the minute. God, do I want a man!"

Theo asked, "Harry, is that woman a breeder?"

Harry replied, "Not exactly. She's just stimulated by riding. It happens to some women when they ride a motorcycle or a horse. Riding a centaur is almost exactly like riding a horse. No offense intended."

Theo said, "None taken, Harry."

Chapter 6

The Lizzar Chief of Commanders glared at his technicians. He bellowed, "There is no technology on that piece of Earth! It's too small!"

A technician replied, "Sire, the centaurs took the technology. It isn't our fault that they showed up. If we had more time to recharge, we could have taken a larger piece of Earth."

The Chief asked, "How long do you need to properly recharge?"

"At least five days. If we have more time, we can grab a bigger piece."

"I'll give you ten days. I expect a piece of Earth big enough to reveal all their technology to us. Do not fail me."

• • •

John entered the slave quarters as the sun dropped over the horizon. He was startled to see that there were more women present. However, he didn't recognize any of them and instantly concluded that the Lizzars had stolen another piece of Earth. He made his way to his sleeping area and waited for instructions from the Lizzars.

A Lizzar shouted, "Begin producing! All pregnant women are to raise their hands!"

John dropped himself onto the first woman in his area without wondering how the new women would be assigned. He didn't notice immediately that two of his women raised their hands.

Kelly gasped at seeing the men screwing in full view of everyone. She

didn't understand anything the lizard people said, but it was obvious to her that the other people did. She watched as several women who raised their hands were led away by more of the lizard soldiers.

A lizard soldier grabbed her by the elbow. Not daring to resist, Kelly meekly followed along as he led her to one of the areas where the men and women busily produced. The lizard soldier shoved her down among other naked women.

"Hi, I'm Cheryl. Do you understand the Lizzar language?"

Kelly answered, "No, I don't. I'm Kelly. What's going on here?"

"We're all slaves now. If we don't do as we're told, we get punished. The Lizzars want all us women pregnant so they can breed more slaves. The men don't have much choice in the matter. If they refuse, we're the ones who are punished. If we try to refuse, we're punished even worse. Whatever you do, don't refuse their orders."

Kelly asked, "Where'd those other women go?"

"They're pregnant. That's the only way to get out of this room alive except during the day when we grade the ore."

"Grade the ore?" asked Kelly.

"Yes, the men go into the mines during the day and dig out the ore. The centaurs drag it outside where we have to separate it into different grades."

The Lizzar shouted, "Change!"

John got up from the woman and came over to Cheryl. She opened her legs and let him enter her.

"Don't you have any say?" asked Kelly.

Cheryl said, "No, we don't. I'd rather go through this than be whipped or killed. When John gets to you, don't even think about it. Just let him take you. He's a good lover under different circumstances. John, this is Kelly."

John gasped, "Hi, Kelly. I'll try to be gentle, but they sometimes order us to be rough."

Kelly said, "Hi, John. How will I know when it's my turn?"

Cheryl said, "I'll let you know. So, what town are you from? We were in Conway when it was stolen by the Lizzars."

Kelly said, "I was in prison when they got me. All the women I came with were in the prison, either as inmates or guards. I think there are four guards still alive among us."

John exclaimed, "Convicts?"

Kelly said, "Yes, most of us. I won't lie. I did what I was caught and sentenced for. I knew I was carrying illegal drugs."

"Is that all?" John asked.

Kelly said, "Should I have done more? That's all I did wrong. Other than having bad judgment."

"Oh god, I just came again. I hope those damn Lizzars let us change soon," John gasped.

"We think they might be slipping us some kind of fertility drugs in our food. The men have been coming more and more often than before. John typically comes at least four times each night," Cheryl said.

Kelly said, "I notice that some of the men only have one woman."

Cheryl said, "The Lizzars base how many women a man can handle by his size. John's got the largest, so he gets the most women."

Another woman was shoved next to Kelly by a Lizzar.

"Find out anything, Kelly?"

Kelly said, "That's John and Cheryl. They're from Conway. We're supposed to all get pregnant and give the Lizzars more slaves. This is Wendy. She was a guard."

John and Cheryl said, "Hi Wendy."

A Lizzar shouted, "Change!"

John got up off Cheryl and went to his next woman.

Cheryl said, "Kelly, you're next after Amethyst. Wendy, you're after Kelly. Don't refuse, either. The Lizzars only punish us if there are any problems, not the men."

Wendy said, "Typical male response. It's always the woman's fault."

Kelly said, "John has the most women assigned to him because he has the mostest between his legs. Aren't we lucky?"

Wendy said, "Well, at least he'll be shooting blanks by the time he reaches me."

Cheryl said, "Don't be so sure of that. We think the Lizzars are slipping fertility drugs in our food. John can come four or more times now. He's already got five women pregnant. By the way, that's Amandalee and Melanie. These are Kelly and Wendy."

Amandalee said, "Hi. Forgive me for not speaking earlier, but I had a rough day."

Melanie said, "Same here and I think I might be pregnant."

Amandalee said, "Oh no! Are you sure?"

"No, I'm not sure yet," Melanie said.

A Lizzar came over and looked at John briefly before saying something.

Cheryl said, "The Lizzar is telling John to fondle her. The Lizzars are real big on us stimulating each other to peak performance. They've been

given instructions on what we should do by some of our people who turned traitor. If John doesn't do what they order, they'll take the woman to the center of the room and give her to every man in here no matter how long it takes."

Kelly and Wendy watched as John fondled the woman's breasts. She reached around and did her best to reciprocate.

Amandalee said, "She was just told that she wasn't fondling him enough. Don't worry, you'll learn enough of the language soon enough to know what they're ordering. We'll help teach you so you can avoid punishment."

Kelly said, "Thanks, I guess."

The Lizzar controller shouted, "Change!"

John went over to Amethyst who quickly responded to him.

Cheryl said, "One more thing, the Lizzars don't allow us to suck. That gets you the worst punishment possible, except for death. Also, have you noticed how quickly John moves to the next woman? He has to. The Lizzars don't want him dripping any semen on the ground."

Kelly said, "I noticed that he held himself that time."

Cheryl said, "He must still be coming. He does that to keep us from being punished for not taking him quickly enough to receive his sperm."

Kelly commented snidely, "Nice guy."

Cheryl looked hurt. "He really is. Remember, he's not the one who'll be punished if his sperm hits the ground. The next woman in line is. By the way, if you're not lubricated yet, you better get yourself that way. John's awful large and you better be lubricated if you want him to enter you without hurting you too much. The Lizzars don't care if we masturbate. John can't, though. That's about the only thing he can be punished for other than refusing orders during the day."

• • •

Upon reaching the camp, Andrea was startled to see the warden taking on three men at one time. Andrea finally turned away after seeing a bit too much while others continued to watch in complete fascination. Of course, it was difficult to hide anything in an open meadow where the centaurs lived. After all, they couldn't venture freely into the forests because of the dangers from coil vines. Consequently, the centaurs had grown up in an open society and had no means of providing privacy to people who grew up with different concepts.

Dennis said, "First nymphomaniac I ever knew and there isn't a man who can keep up with her. Priscilla will keep on going for hours before she'll tire out."

Steve asked, "And the centaurs allow this kind of behavior?"

Dennis said, "She voluntarily took the status of breeder. Any man who wants her can take her at anytime. You don't even have to ask. If you want her, just walk up and take her. That's all there is to it. The centaur society is very simple in some of its rules. Their females who take the breeder status are the same way."

Steve said, "Just walk up and take her? What if she's asleep or eating?"

Dennis answered, "She'd rather have you than do either of those. You can make her very happy by slipping it to her while she's asleep. She'll wake up and screw your brains out. Priscilla is just perpetually horny. Even if she's doing someone else, she'd rather that you just joined in. I've seen her take up to five men at a time."

"Five? And she's still not satisfied?" exclaimed Steve.

"You better believe it. If I wasn't married to Gail, I'd be tempted to try her once myself, but Gail would cut my balls off if I so much as take another woman," Dennis replied.

Steve asked, "Okay, so marriage is still a choice. What else is there?"

Dennis said, "Marriage is a choice, but you don't have to limit yourself to one wife. When we realized that we were stuck on this world, we decided that permitting more than one wife or husband might be the best way to deal with the problem of infidelity for some people. You met Harry. He shares two women with another man in a group marriage. They swap every night and sometimes sleep together in an orgy-like manner. It seems to work for them, so none of us say anything. Considering the fact that we now have over forty more women, the only way some of them are going to ever have a marriage is to accept sharing a husband. That or they'll have to become breeders."

Steve asked, "You mean, you either have to get married or become a breeder?"

"No, I don't mean it like that at all. You don't have to do either of those. You can remain single if you want. I mean, anyone can remain single. The only problem there is that you're expected to be a warrior unless you're a breeder. Though married women are considered breeders, they're permitted to be warriors, too, even though the centaurs feel that they shouldn't be warriors," Dennis answered.

"Why is that?"

Dennis replied, "Because they value the family structure. Someone has to see to perpetuating the race. The centaurs are struggling to understand us. They're being tolerant of our behavior for now since they need us as much as we need them to survive. We're hoping that once the war ends, this problem will go away on its own. Most of us are fairly certain that it won't be considered a problem then."

Steve said, "I think I understand now, but just barely."

Dennis said, "You better watch out, though. Once Priscilla sees you, she's going to want you."

Steve blushed, then said, "I'll keep that in mind. I've already had three proposals for sack time this evening."

Dennis said, "Then you better think about enjoying yourself and getting what you can. For all you know, you might die tomorrow. If nothing else, if you can get one of the women pregnant, you'll be helping us achieve long term survival by seeing to it that your genes are passed on."

"You make it all sound so necessary and clinical," Steve said.

Dennis said, "Unless you're married, there's little room left in our lives now for love and passion. You'll find that we're currently divided into two different opinions concerning long term survival. Some of us want to see to it that our children don't breed idiots. Some of us feel that nature will take its course and straighten out things over the long run on its own, even if it means that our numbers decrease first before they increase. You'll have to decide for yourself about how you feel about this. However you feel, we limit the topic to discussion only. We don't allow fighting over it."

Steve asked, "So, what's the current split of opinion in numbers?"

Dennis said, "Hard to say now with so many new people around. Most of the men are of the opinion that we're going to have to go along with whatever the women decide since they outnumber us. Now that we have over forty more women, I don't know what the split is. Your guess is as good as mine."

Steve asked, "Well, what was the difference before we came along?"

Dennis said, "Well, it was beginning to look like we'd have to suffer a decrease first and lose some of the genes the women can provide."

Steve said, "Seems to me that both sides can win. Those who want to screw around to save their genes should be permitted to do so. Those who don't shouldn't be forced to contribute."

Dennis said, "That much is true. Still, we'll lose some of our gene pool. But we're not going to force anyone to participate if they don't want to."

• • •

As John continued to pound away at Wendy under the watchful eyes of the Lizzar captors, his thoughts were focused on other matters. He knew without a doubt that the tractor beam sites had to be found and destroyed. Only by depriving the enemy of those could they assure themselves of victory, even though he knew it meant they would be marooned on a strange world for the rest of their lives. If the Lizzars weren't deprived of their tractor beam sites, then sooner or later they'd succeed in capturing the technology they needed to win the entire war. He knew that if that happened, it might not be long before they attacked the Earth itself. It wasn't just for the preservation of their own lives and freedom that they had to destroy the sites.

John knew that he had to escape to warn the allies of their danger. His only problem was that he was watched much too closely as their prize stud. He wasn't sure how or when he could escape or even if it might be too late by then.

Then he noticed that another woman was being brought over to him, increasing his harem in number yet again. He continued to pound away at Wendy while the other women briefed the woman on what was happening and what to expect. She was soon preparing herself for him.

Chapter 7

Over Commander Zira said, "We gained more than we lost in the battle. Though we will miss those warriors who died, we cannot take the time to mourn them as we have much to do. Dennis, how is the reading program coming along? Are my people learning properly?"

Dennis said, "Almost all the breeders know how to read now since they have more time to learn. We're not doing as well with the warriors because of mission requirements, but that's to be expected. We did get a number of new texts to use. Some cover processes we had little information on before. I'm organizing a group of new women to act as teachers so we should see more progress than before now that we can give more individualized instruction."

Zira said, "That is good. Still, I will talk to the warriors. Anything more

to report?"

Dennis shook his head.

"What is our ammunition status, Jim?" Zira asked.

"Pretty poor. Most of us will be using bows and arrows soon. I have an idea that might help some. If we carry more arrows in the vehicles for everyone, we can let the warriors use their arrows more freely. When they run out, they can report to one of the vehicles for resupply. I feel that we can carry enough to wipe out a Lizzar force like we ran into yesterday," Jim answered.

Zira said, "Then the bullets must be conserved for use against the lasers. This is my decision. See to it that everyone understands. Shotguns may still be used to kill Lizzar leaders. Did my eyes deceive me or were the Lizzars able to compensate better than before from the loss of leaders?"

Commander Haro said, "I saw the same thing happening."

"Then they've probably instituted a system of lower ranks within their units. If that's the case, you might be better letting some of their leaders live if you believe them to be incompetent. Otherwise, you could be elevating a more competent leader into command," Jim said.

"What is this system of lower ranks?" Zira asked.

"You designate individuals within the unit ahead of time to move up into command if the leadership is killed off. That way the unit continues to function. To give them a chance to learn how to lead before they take over, you let them lead smaller groups within the major unit. It's kind of like when you send out a scouting party and designate one individual in charge. The only difference is the lower rank remains available even after small missions such as scouting," Jim answered.

Zira said, "Then we shall have such a system ourselves. Commander Haro, consult with Jim or whoever has the knowledge to create a system for us. I will evaluate warriors to receive these ranks. I will want your recommendations along with those of my other unit commanders. Jim, how many of these should be in each unit?"

"Depends on what you choose. Most small military units on Earth possessed anywhere from four or five to a dozen such lower ranks. Usually each lower rank commanded a squad consisting of themselves and nine other soldiers," Jim answered.

Zira said, "Then we shall follow that example. One of every ten warriors shall become a lower rank capable of taking over the unit if its commander is lost. Now on to other matters. Did we get sufficient repair parts for your APC?"

Pete said, "Sure did. We had to leave some parts behind, but those were less important. We went after the vital parts and got enough radio parts to fix ours. Mike is working on that now. She sure is a blessing to have with us now."

Zira said, "In that case, assign warriors to protect her, Sub-commander Theo. If she is important to us, then we shall not risk her in battle. Does her radio still work?"

Pete said, "Sure does. We were able to communicate with the radio taken from the Conway police station. Good thing it was carried out before the Lizzars could get it. Once we get the APC's radio back in operation, we can contact our reinforcements without having to send runners."

Zira said, "This is extremely good to hear. What else did we accomplish?"

"We picked up a bunch of pepper spray and stun guns. They're only good for close combat, but they're not lethal. They might be useful for intelligence missions where we only want to incapacitate a Lizzar so we can question him. We can always kill him afterwards," Gail said.

Zira said, "I'm still not used to this idea of capturing Lizzars. Their warriors know so little."

"Yes, but what they do know they're usually willing to talk about," Gail said.

"If the Lizzars are instituting lower ranks, that might change soon. My guess is that they'll become more security conscious as well. Whether we like it or not, the way this war is being fought is changing again. It's up to us to adapt if we're to remain on top of the situation. To do that, we'll have to capture and interrogate Lizzars. We have to know what they're being taught or told," Jim said.

Zira said, "You present strong reasons. We shall do as you suggest. From now on, each mission will attempt to capture at least one Lizzar, if they encounter any, to bring back for questioning."

• • •

Steve handed Mike some more parts. She appeared happy as she worked on the radio for the APC.

She said, "It seems too coincidental that all the radios were tuned to the same frequency. Did you notice that my room was almost dead center of the area the Lizzars took from Earth?"

Steve said, "No, I didn't notice that. However, I think you're right. Do

you think that had something to do with us being taken?"

Mike answered, "I'm beginning to believe that it did. Oh, there's Harry. Hey, Harry! Over here for a moment!"

Harry walked over to stand between Mike and Steve who sat on the grass working on the APC's radio. "What's up? You need something?"

Mike asked, "Where was the police station in relation to the rest of Conway that the Lizzars grabbed? Was it in the center?"

Harry said, "I think it was almost dead center. Why?"

Mike said, "Because the police radio was using the same frequency I was on at the time we were grabbed. My room was just about dead center of what came along with us. Can you find out about the prison? Was their radio room also dead center of what came here?"

Harry said, "It sounds like you're onto something. I'll find out for you."

"I'd appreciate it, Harry. I'm betting that their radio was on at the time, too," she said.

Harry said, "I'm almost sure it was. Why were you on the police band, though?"

She said, "I had the radio on scanning mode at the time, though the volume was down. I use my radio to furnish background noise like other people use music. I just like to hear people talk. I had to change the frequency when the battery came on because the temporary loss of power ended the scanning mode. I'm fairly positive that the radio was on the same frequency as the Conway police station at the moment we were grabbed. Even though the APC radio wasn't working, it was set to the same frequency when I started working on it. I haven't gotten to the other radio yet."

Harry said, "So that's how we were selected. That's interesting. I guess we can look forward to more police coming."

"Not necessarily. It was an official band, but it might be in use by a hospital or rescue service in a different location," Mike said.

Harry said, "Well, we can certainly use those here. We don't have anything really to treat the wounded. Band-aids and sympathy don't do much."

Steve said, "Wouldn't it just piss off the Lizzars if they happened to grab a helicopter and nothing else? When it arrived, it would simply fly off."

Harry said, "Makes you wonder if they haven't already. I'll advise the Over Commander to have someone watch for a downed helicopter since it wouldn't have much fuel left, if any."

Steve said, "Provided they didn't suffocate themselves on fumes before

they arrived.”

• • •

Andrea stood up and looked around. She felt that there ought to be something to do besides lie around and sleep. The other women around her, for the most part, were lying about, some of them sleeping. The centaurs were either making out, practicing maneuvers, or practicing with their swords, spears, and bows. She noticed Mike and Steve were working on the radios. She also saw immediately how large Steve was between the legs.

For a moment, she thought he was sexually aroused, then she realized that was his limp size. Even though seeing Priscilla the night before had disgusted her, she still felt a desire for the same thing.

Andrea suddenly realized she was openly rubbing herself with one hand while eyeing Steve hungrily. Embarrassed, she glanced around to see if anyone was watching her, but no one was. She turned her attention back to Steve. Andrea soon forgot herself and her embarrassment when she realized she was rubbing herself once more. Rather than just stop, she kept rubbing until she drew up enough courage to walk over to him.

Steve looked up at Andrea as she rubbed herself. He could see her eyes were fixed on him just below his waist.

Andrea asked, “Would you please? I’m so damn horny now that I can’t think straight.”

He answered, “Well, I’m busy right now...”

“Aw, go ahead and take her. We’re not exactly living under the nudist philosophy anymore,” Mike said.

Andrea lay down beside Steve and reached out for him with her free hand. Steve was about to reach down and remove her hand when Mike slapped him.

“What’s that for?” he asked.

“Can’t you see that she needs someone right now? God, some men! When you don’t want them, they’re as horny as shit and just as insistent. When you do want them, they have other things to do. Go ahead and screw her. I can handle the radio myself,” Mike exclaimed.

“Here? In front of you?” Steve asked.

“Why not? There isn’t anyplace around here where I couldn’t see you unless you go inside one of the vehicles. Besides, I might learn something,” Mike replied.

Mike reached over and shoved Steve toward Andrea, leaving him with little choice. Andrea tugged on him to enter her. Steve finally shoved himself in as Andrea released her hold on him.

Mike asked, "Is he any good, Andrea?"

"Oh, god, yes. This was definitely worth it," she moaned. "If you don't claim him now, you're soon going to have a lot of competition, including me. He can have me just about whenever he feels like it, now that I know he's a good lay."

Mike glanced around at the other women, noticing for the first time that a few were staring at Steve and Andrea. Mike looked over at Steve for a moment before she stood up to stretch the kinks out of her legs as she considered her situation. She knew that Steve had received several propositions the day before but hadn't accepted. Now she wondered if there was a chemistry building between them that she might have destroyed by pushing him toward Andrea. As she walked around, she couldn't help but glance down at them. Doing so caused Mike to suddenly realize that she wanted Steve like Andrea minutes before.

Mike asked, "Steve, can you take me, too, now? I'd very much like to have you."

"What?" asked Steve.

"I asked you to take me. Please?"

Steve said, "Okay, as soon as Andrea releases me."

Andrea said, "I can take a hint. Thank you, Steve, for being so nice. I meant what I said earlier. You want me, just say so and I'm yours."

Steve said, "You're welcome and, uh, thank you."

Steve got to his hands and knees and slowly withdrew from Andrea who moaned with pleasure. By the time he was out, Mike was lying beside Andrea with her legs open. He crawled over and let her hands take hold and guide him into place. He began to gently enter and she let go so he could.

Mike said, "I like it slow so it lasts long. Okay with you, Steve?"

"Whatever you want. I'm a little winded after that workout, anyway," he replied.

Mike placed her hands against his chest and felt of him for the first time. She delighted in feeling of his firm muscular shoulders and ran her hands back down his chest to his hips. She gripped his hips and threw her own against him to put a little extra push in the next stroke. Almost at once, she felt him go deep inside her to places no man had ever reached before. The sensation was spectacularly different from any other man as she felt so much of him slide by her erotic zones, stimulating them longer

than usual.

Mike whispered, "Yes, slow and go deep every so often, lover. You are good in bed. Did you know that?"

Steve said, "Kind of, but I also been told I wasn't any good. I guess that's because of individual preferences."

"More likely they didn't know what good was. You're definitely good, so you just keep stroking away. Let me know if you need help or a change in positions so I won't wear you out," Mike said.

Mike gasped with a low moan a few minutes later as her first orgasm overtook her. She moaned again as the orgasm built in intensity. "Oh, god, Steve, you're great! Keep doing that, lover!" she gasped out.

Andrea moaned, "He's going to be in big demand, isn't he?"

Mike replied, "Oh, god, yes. Do you want to marry me, Steve? I'll swear to be yours only if you'll marry me."

Steve stopped momentarily. He exclaimed, "Marriage? But we hardly know each other."

"So what? Sex, good sex, that is, ought to be enough reason for marriage," Mike said.

Steve asked, "What about love?" before he felt her fingernails jab him lightly to remind him about what he was supposed to be doing.

"Well, love is nice, but I never thought I'd meet a man who could thrill me so much in bed," Mike answered.

Steve said, "I was hoping for love before I settled down into marriage. Would you mind if I don't marry you? Just yet, that is?"

"Will you still be available to me?" asked Mike.

Steve said, "I don't see why not. After all, we might fall in love."

"In that case, I don't mind that you won't marry me right now. Just remember that I'm willing," Mike said.

Andrea asked, "Mike, are you willing to accept a multiple-wife marriage?"

Mike turned her head toward Andrea and looked her straight in the eyes.

Andrea said, "If I have to, I'll marry him, too, so you won't cut me off. Look around you. There's only nine men in camp and over fifty women. You're going to have to share him somehow or you'll have some of those women pissed off at you. Remember, they can see what he's got and how much satisfaction you're getting. I know even better just how well he's satisfying you."

Mike moaned, then replied, "I saw what you're getting at. It was partly

what made me horny in the first place. It's just that I'm not sure if I want to share Steve in a marriage."

Andrea said, "I don't think you'll have much choice in his case. He's not like the other men. You can feel that, can't you?"

"Hell yes, I can feel the difference! I can tell that he's not like other men," Mike exclaimed.

Andrea said, "Steve, you don't have to marry Mike. If you don't, you can have all the women you want once the other women find out how good you are. You'll practically have to fight them off each night."

Steve said, "It'll be the first time I've ever found myself in trouble for not taking women."

Andrea asked, "You got in trouble taking a woman before? Did you rape her?"

Steve answered, "I never raped any woman, but I got in trouble once before."

Andrea asked, "How?"

Mike said, "Let him finish me first. Then he can tell how he got into trouble. Okay?"

Andrea said, "Sorry."

• • •

Steve felt himself finally come a second time. Mike instantly drew him toward her. She knew that Andrea was right about the other women wanting him, especially if they learned that Mike had five orgasms of her own in the one session. She stroked his brawny back and shoulders while ignoring her squeezed nipples as he lay upon her panting heavily.

As she glanced around her, she saw that she had apparently attracted an audience as several women and centaurs were standing nearby.

"Are you finished?" one centaur asked.

Mike answered, "For the most part. We're just lying here enjoying the lingering after effects. Did you need something?"

"I'm Sub-commander Theo. The warriors beside me are to be your bodyguards. Your radio knowledge is too important to lose, so you are to be protected day and night from now on. Whatever you want to do is your business. They are simply to protect you. Let me know immediately if there are any problems. Oh, I hope you are enjoying yourself."

Mike replied, "Thank you, Sub-commander Theo. Yes, I'm enjoying myself tremendously. I didn't realize just how horny I was getting until

Andrea made out with Steve right beside me. Bigger isn't always better, but this time it is."

Theo said, "I shall leave you to your work and enjoyment. If you need anything, one of the guards will always know how to contact me."

Mike said, "Thanks, again," as Theo walked away.

Andrea asked, "Well, can Steve tell us his story now?"

"If he wants to. I think I'd like to hear it as well," Mike said.

Steve said, "It's embarrassing. I'd really rather not tell about it."

Andrea said, "I'll tell you mine if you'll tell me yours."

"Same here. Please tell us," Mike said.

Andrea said, "Spill it or I'll tell the other women you want to have sex all night tonight."

Steve exclaimed, "That's blackmail!"

"It's not even fair, but I like it. You're so devious, Andrea," Mike said.

Steve said, "Okay, let me up, Mike, and I'll tell."

She said, "No way. I'm keeping right here so you can't run away. Now tell, or you'll get more of this," as she dug her nails into him. She felt him shove deeper and spurt slightly once more inside her. "Oh, that was good. You do still have some more life in you."

"All right, all right, I'll tell. You already know that I'm a nudist. I've been one all my life without any trouble being around girls until I was a teenager. I went on a field trip with my school class. It was my sophomore year and almost the end of the school year. Because we were expected to get somewhat dirty on the trip, we were told to wear old clothes. Since all I had were good clothes, not needing any when I got home each day, I had to borrow some from a friend. Well, he sabotaged me royally. He gave me a pair of pants that were ready to fall apart and I never wore any underwear, except for a jock strap in gym. I wasn't wearing that at the time since it wasn't gym class. We went out in teams to collect the specimens for our biology class. Being kids, we ran off to our assignments. I didn't think about the pants being so worn out that they'd fall apart, but they were sabotaged. My friend had carefully cut small perforations from the fly to the back waist. Anyway, I was fine until we reached a ditch and had to jump across. When I leaped across it, those pants split along the perforation leaving me hanging out. My team consisted of one other boy and four girls. You can imagine the looks I got. I was big even then. So, I practically dived into a bush so I wouldn't embarrass the girls and told them to go on without me. I thought they all left, but one girl came back. She lifted her dress and showed me her pussy before asking if I'd like to take a different

kind of field trip.”

Andrea was giggling hysterically. Mike asked, “So, you agreed?”

Steve said, “Yes, I agreed because I wondered already what it was like to have sex. I was being offered my chance to find out, so I went ahead and took off what I was wearing while she did the same. We were going at it hot and strong when the teacher happened to walk by. I would have been in bigger trouble except the girl was on top at the time. There was no way for anyone to think that I was raping her. I mean, she was just having the time of her life going up and down on me. Needless to say, I was sent back to the bus while she had to stay beside the teacher the rest of the afternoon. It was all my father could do to keep a straight face when I explained the whole mess in the car after he picked me up at school. That was when he told me that I made the wisest decision in my life by letting the girl make the advances. Somehow, I don't think his advice is going to be of much use here. Now you've heard about my first time. Okay?”

Mike was giggling alongside of Andrea. Even some other women nearby were laughing.

Steve said, “I guess this will be all over camp before long.”

“We're still trying to find out about Priscilla's first time. We figure hers has to be the best, but yours was definitely funny,” Angelica said.

Steve said, “I think Andrea and Mike now owe me their stories.”

Angelica said, “I remember them saying that. Who's first?”

Andrea said, “I'll go first, but you won't like mine. I don't like remembering it, but it's partly the cause for me going to prison. My father took me for my first time. My mother was out shopping and he called me into his bedroom and ordered me to strip. Since he was my father, I did as he told me. Afterwards, he threatened the life of my cat to keep me quiet. That went on for a couple of years until my cat was killed by a car. That was when I told my mother what was happening every weekend she went shopping. The next time she went shopping, she picked up a little extra and came home early enough to catch him on top of me. That was when she killed him and ran, leaving me under my father and the gun on the floor nearby.”

Angelica said, “You didn't kill your father?”

Andrea replied, “No, but I couldn't prove it because my mother was killed in a traffic accident less than an hour later. That or she killed herself with her car. No one bothered to check her for gunpowder residues. She was figured by the police to be miles away shopping and I was stuck there under my father whose brains she blew out from only a foot away. Anyway,

I was hysterical enough as it was with my dead father still on top when the police arrived."

"Then they told me I was pregnant. I went ahead and had an abortion which pissed off the authorities even more, despite the incest. I think that's why they didn't check out anything else. They wanted to get me for murder even if they had to frame me. With only a crummy public defender, I didn't stand a chance. I was lucky that I didn't get the death penalty with the way things were going. Anyway, that's how my first and all my times were until today."

"Steve's the first man I gave myself to voluntarily, so he could be considered to be my first. This was truthfully the first time I ever wanted a man when I said so. I used to have to tell my father that I wanted him, but I never meant it."

"I think I should tell mine later when we're in a better mood," Mike said.

Andrea said, "Mike, I want to hear your story. We need something to lift us out of the dump I put us all in. Please tell it."

"Sure, you might as well. I've a feeling that Andrea's right. We need a little lift now. Tell us about your first," Angelica said.

Steve said, "Yes, tell us. I told you about my embarrassing first time. What was yours like? Is it as funny as mine?"

"Oh, I'd say that it's funny. I had this crush on a guy at school. High school, that is. I'd saved myself up until my junior year. It was almost time for the junior prom. High school rings and all the nice stuff that happens then. I'd been hanging around this one guy for most of the year so it wasn't at all unexpected for us to go to the junior prom as each other's dates. Anyway, we got our rings, posed for some photos, and danced some. He was an exquisite dancer. He went on to do that professionally," Mike said.

"Anyway, I had the hots for him and asked to leave early. He was a perfect gentleman and fetched my wrap. We left in his father's car. I snuggled up close to him, though that was a bit hard to do with front bucket seats. Almost immediately, I realized he didn't have the slightest clue about my intentions as he was driving us home. I had to ask him to drive us somewhere secluded so we could talk. He agreed, though I think he thought I wanted to talk about something else. I finally had to tell him where to drive us."

"We arrived beside the lake on the far side where no one lived. That was about as secluded as we could find without having other teens around us. When we got there, I bounded out of the car, leaving my wrap behind

me and twirled around once or twice in the night air. It was still light enough to see since there was a full moon at the time. I wasn't worried about tripping and falling in my pretty dress. He finally caught up with me. He smoked a cigarette and we walked toward the lake with me clutching onto his elbow expecting him to ask me to give my body to him at every moment."

"Anyway, he was still being a perfect gentleman. He didn't ask me at all to have sex. When we reached the water, I was getting desperate since he seemed slow as all get out and completely dense about having sex. That was when I suggested that we go swimming. He looked at me as if I was crazy, but I wanted to get him naked and hopefully in the mood. That was when I dared him to go swimming with me. I was ready to threaten him by making up stories the next week at school, but he accepted my dare."

"I stripped off completely while he kept on his briefs. One thing for sure, he had on the sexiest pair of briefs I'd ever seen. Even without a hard on, he looked fairly well hung, though not nearly half the size of Steve once he did get an erection. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. We went into the water and it was still cold, but I was determined to have my way with him and lose my virginity. I was absolutely certain that I was in love with him."

"Once we got into the water, we splashed around a bit and then we moved closer to talk about how school had been so far for each of us. When I was close enough, I ducked down and slipped his briefs off him down to his knees. As I came up, I grabbed hold of his cock and said, 'We're going to conduct some business on the shore.' That's how I really said it. I just led him by his cock which expanded inside my grip until we were standing on the shore. That was when I forced him down on top of me and spread my legs before positioning him. I had to tell him to shove it in and get to humping. He was a miserable lay, but he managed to rid me of my virginity at least. I'm not even sure if he came."

Mike paused as the others were giggling. Angelica was saying, "God, you sounded like a hooker!"

Mike went on, "When he finished, neither of us were really very satisfied. He asked me why I did all that. That was when I told him that I was in love with him. It was just after I finished confessing my soul that he admitted he was gay and in love with a boy! I was mortified to think that I'd just made love to a queer! I shoved him off me and ran back to the water! He followed, begging me to keep quiet about him and he wouldn't say anything about what we did. We quietly agreed and left the water after

we both finished washing ourselves. We had to stand there together still naked in the night air to dry off before either of us could put our clothes on. Neither of us wanted to look at the other. We hardly spoke a dozen words after our agreement."

"Once we were dry enough to dress, I let him drive me home. I swore never to date anyone who hadn't dated other girls. I kept that promise and only dated guys in my senior year who had been out with other girls. Of course, I checked before hand with some of my close friends about whether he'd tried to get anywhere with them, figuring that a gay boy wouldn't try to get past holding hands. I finally had my first satisfying sexual encounter near Christmas of my senior year. He didn't have as much between the legs, but he knew how to use it. Anyway, that's my story."

Andrea said, "That is funny!"

"You could have claimed to be trying to convert him if anyone found out," Angelica said.

"I thought of that much later and was ready to claim just that in case he ever talked, but he never said a word about it. I found out from him before our agreement that he went through with taking me because he wondered whether women were any good or not. I really disappointed him and probably made him a confirmed homosexual in the process," Mike said.

"Oh god! You must have hated yourself all summer," Angelica said.

"I sure did. I thought I was the worst disgrace to womanhood in the world for not being a good lay and failing to convert him," Mike said.

Steve said, "We better get back to the radios after we clean up. They're depending on you, Mike."

"I know, I know. I just want to lie here for awhile and enjoy this feeling until it fades away," she replied.

Chapter 8

Over Commander Zira said, "It's been five days and there isn't another piece of Earth anywhere near the prison or dormitory according to our scouts. Either the Lizzars have moved their tractor beam site or they've changed their schedule. Nor have they amassed any troops at that site. That's why I believe that they've probably moved it."

Commander Haro asked, "What about the mining sites? We've spotted

another one. Shouldn't we mount an attack on it?"

Zira replied, "Only if we can be sure to free some people or warriors. I don't want to send another mission out to return empty handed. What we need is some new information. Send out a small party to capture a Lizzar near the mining camp. Let's find out ahead of time what's in it. The humans are right that we wasted too much energy in the past without the right results."

Sub-commander Theo said, "I know a good squad that wants to go out on a mission. May I send them?"

Zira nodded.

• • •

Rone galloped away from the base camp. He was followed by his squad. Each warrior carried a bow along with a quill full of arrows. Rone carried those and a shotgun as well as one of the stun guns. He hoped it would work on a Lizzar since it was his mission to capture one.

• • •

Mike looked up from her work. She plugged the radio into the generator line and waved for it to be fired up. A moment later, it was chugging away steadily. She picked up the handset and spoke softly, "Test, test. If you can hear me, Steve, I want your body. I want you now. Test, test."

She glanced up at Steve to see if he was able to receive her while listening to hear any response.

"Are you trying to get me horny?" he replied.

Mike switched to send and said, "Good, the radio works. Now we can actually have some serious sex. Shut it off and get over here unless you want me to crawl over and beg."

He replied, "Would you really do that?"

Mike answered, "Don't push me, Steve. You're the only man who ever gave me five orgasms and you've done it twice now."

Steve said, "Shutting off and turning on. Be there in a few moments."

Mike turned to one of her centaur bodyguards and said, "Tell Theo that all the radios now work. After I play around some, I'll install it in the generator car."

The centaur said, "You deserve your play time. Enjoy yourself. I shall return after informing Sub-commander Theo."

Mike wondered if any of her hair would ever grow back. Her scalp was

still smooth with not the slightest stubble on it. Nor did she have any other hair on her body as yet and it had already been five days since it disappeared. Of course, there was one advantage to not having any hair. She could fool around without Steve getting any hair in his teeth nor did she get any hairs caught in her when he entered her. He was certainly a tight fit. She was sure that a hair in that instance would hurt worse than usual.

So far, she hadn't seen any hair growing back on any of the other women or on Steve. He didn't even have any beard stubble, which was nice since there weren't but so many razors to go around. Consequently, most of the other men were growing beards. It was easier keeping their beards short rather than trying to remain clean-shaven.

Mike smiled as Steve walked toward her. She could see that he was already in the mood, though not fully aroused as yet.

• • •

Rone said, "The camp isn't very far ahead. We'll use the scope first to observe from long distance in case they have a laser. If the way is clear, then we'll move in and find a suitable Lizzar to capture."

Another centaur asked, "How will we know the Lizzar is suitable?"

Rone said, "It will be night. He'll be alone and far enough away from others for us to grab him."

• • •

Mike finished putting the radio into the generator car. She tested it once more with Steve some distance away at another radio.

"Test, test. I like Steve in bed. You were great today, honey. Thank you. Test, test."

"I still hear you loud and clear. I enjoyed you, too. Shutting down now," he replied.

• • •

Zira nodded at hearing that all four radios were functional. "Now that we can communicate over long distances, Mike's value is even more important to maintain this capability. She is to retain the bodyguards at all times. This new way of fighting may be difficult for some of the warriors to understand, but if fighting sometimes means that a warrior never sees the enemy, then so be it. Be sure to rotate the warriors protecting Mike so that

they can see some action. That might compensate them for such dull duty."

Theo said, "I've already set up a rotating schedule with Gail's assistance."

Zira said, "Good! I wish we could have sent a radio with the scouting mission. Instead, we have to wait for them to return so we can find out what they saw."

Theo added, "And to interrogate their prisoner if they succeeded in capturing one."

Zira said, "That, too. I understand there is still nothing happening near the prison."

Commander Haro said, "Nothing is happening there. It's as if they've deserted it."

"I simply don't believe that the Lizzars have given up on finding anything in the prison or dormitory. I suggest we send a patrol there to check it out. Perhaps they have seen us coming and are hiding. Have the patrol approach from a different route," Jim said.

Zira said, "Commander Haro, I give you that task. Check out the prison and dormitory as Jim suggests."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to go along," Jim said.

Haro said, "And have you doubled up in pain after riding us? If anyone goes, it should be a woman."

Zira said, "Commander Haro is right. I have seen how most of the men are hurt by riding on us when we gallop. Your women have no problems for the most part. If one of your women wants to volunteer to go along, then she may. Otherwise, we'll not risk the mission."

"You're right about how riding bareback on any of you hurts us men. Still, I feel sure that I can rig up something to protect myself," Jim said.

Zira said, "The mission will leave tonight. I will not permit you to go until I've seen you demonstrate how effective your protective measures are. Either get a woman volunteer or the patrol will be strictly warriors."

"I'll circulate among the women to see if any want to volunteer," Jim said.

Zira said, "But not Mike! She is needed to maintain the radios."

"I wasn't going to ask her," Jim said.

• • •

Angelica asked, "Hey, Priscilla! We've all been telling about our first time. What was yours like? Was it an orgy?"

Priscilla turned her head and smiled at Angelica while her nails prodded the man on her to pound away harder. "You really want to know about my first time?"

Sasha said, "Yes, we're very curious. Most of us have wondered after sharing our own stories. Would you share with us?"

Priscilla smiled, then said, "Sure, if you don't mind a few interruptions now and then."

Angelica said, "We'll understand if you're interrupted. Go ahead. We'd really like to hear how you had your first boy or is it boys?"

"It was multiple. Where I lived, there were woods behind the house and a stream that ran through the woods. There was one spot that was perfect for swimming on hot summer days. The boys from the neighborhood used to go into the woods all the time while I was usually sitting at home playing with dolls or other girls. When I got into puberty, something inside me seemed to tell me that I wanted to be with boys. One hot day, I followed some of them into the woods. I was starting to develop and was somewhat ahead of the other girls as I had tits that stuck out already. I also had a slight bush of pubic hair and felt proud that I was becoming a woman," Priscilla said.

"When I followed the boys, I saw them reach the stream where they took off all their clothes to go swimming. It was the first time I ever saw any of them that way. Needless to say, I wasn't horrified by the strange sight of something different between the boys legs than what I had. I somehow knew that it was meant to be used inside what I had, even though my parents hadn't told me anything of the facts of life. What happened after that is that the boys swam themselves into exhaustion before lying naked on the bank to just talk with one another. While they were doing that, I was undressing and playing with myself. I discovered real quickly that a finger felt good where I instinctively knew one of their dicks should be placed. It didn't take me long to get the courage up to walk up to them while still naked and dare them to let me play with them. Some of the boys were older and knew what I was after. They were the ones who let me play first."

"Still, as with all good things, they eventually had to go home and so did I that day. But from that day forward, I went out to the woods every summer day and played with as many as ten boys, giving them and myself more experience than most kids our ages had. It wasn't until the fall after school started that I was caught by my mother while with the boys and sent off to an all-girls school. Now you know what my first time was like."

Angelica said, "God, you took on how many that first time?"

"I remember it as being six boys. They were very careful about keeping our secret so the number didn't go up very fast to ten," Priscilla said.

Angelica asked, "And you didn't have any close calls before your mother caught you?"

Priscilla answered, "Sure we did. We had to run like blazes once and leave all our clothes behind. Course, they were carefully hidden by then as we'd thought about that possibility before that happened. Even though we ran off into the woods, that didn't keep us from stopping once we were safely out of sight to resume our fun. We had some interesting experiments while in the woods."

Sasha said, "Wish I had your guts to try that many."

"It wasn't guts or courage. It was an addiction with me. Still is. I simply had to have it to feed the need I felt. I couldn't go a day without feeling the equivalent of withdrawal pains. Trying to lead a normal life was the pits, but I managed until we wound up here. I'm only glad that I didn't wind up as the warden of a men's prison. I don't think I could have held up for long under the strain of that many men at my disposal," Priscilla said.

• • •

Rone pressed the stun gun against the Lizzar sentry who another centaur lured away from his post with strange sounds. The Lizzar jerked about spasmodically before falling to the ground. Quickly, two other centaur warriors tied up the Lizzar before he was put across the back of the strongest centaur in the squad.

After checking that he had his entire squad, Rone led them away from the mining camp. He wanted to put as much distance as possible between themselves and it before the moons rose in the sky.

• • •

"What is at the mining camp you guarded?" Commander Haro demanded.

"It's a mining camp. There is iron ore there," the prisoner answered.

Haro demanded, "What else? Are there any centaur warriors held there?"

The prisoner answered, "Only slaves. There are no warriors there except for we Lizzars."

"Let me try to get some straight answers from him. Maybe cutting off

his pecker or his balls will make him talk more freely," Jim said.

Haro said, "This is my interrogation. Please restrain yourself, Jim. I'm sure the prisoner wants to discuss this with me in a pleasant manner."

Jim said, "You're too easy on him! It doesn't take much to loosen anyone's tongue. You just have to know where to start!"

Haro said, "I'm conducting this, Jim. Go outside and cool off some."

Jim left the APC the Lizzar was being interrogated within. After he got outside and closed the hatch, he smiled at the other centaur warriors and people waiting for news.

Rone asked, "Are any of our warriors or people there?"

Jim nodded.

• • •

Over Commander Zira said, "Okay, he didn't know much about the next time the tractor beam will be used or where it's at. He did know where a lot of warriors and people are held. Commander Haro, give us the layout you learned from our late prisoner."

Haro said, "Okay, there is a laser unit stationed outside the camp. It's a good thing that Rone approached it from inside their lines instead of from our side. Otherwise his patrol would have run into the laser unit. With that in mind, we'll use two cars to race up to the laser unit and put it out of commission. Some of the prisoners are going to be weak from working in the mines. We'll use the APC to carry them back, particularly since those are mostly men. Any women we find in the camp will have to ride on our backs. I recommend Sub-commander Frea's Fifth Cohort for that task. They're well rested and back up to strength."

Zira nodded.

Haro continued, "For the attack on the guards, after the laser is out, Sub-commander Theo's Second Cohort should be sufficient. The First, Sixth, and Seventh Cohorts will move into blocking positions to prevent reinforcements from reaching the camp before we evacuate all the prisoners."

Again, Zira nodded.

Haro said, "I want to use the radio car to travel among those blocking forces and keep communication with the APC so they'll know when to move out or disengage from the enemy. It wouldn't be to our advantage to lose more warriors than we liberate."

Zira said, "Yes, it is time that we use our radio resources to some

advantage. Much as I dislike remaining here, I've been convinced that I should so that control and overall strategy won't be compromised. I'll be near the radio that Mike brought so I can remain in contact with you. The Eighth and Ninth Cohorts will be standing by to race in and reinforce you if anything goes wrong. The Tenth Cohort stills need rest and to regain unit strength. It will be some while before the new Third and Fourth Cohorts are ready for battle. They are still much too young and sloppy, though they show steady improvement. Most of them have yet to use a breeder. I will not jeopardize our future until necessary."

Commander Haro nodded in agreement. He easily remembered when he was young and a member of an equally young cohort that wanted to do battle but wasn't ready for it. Another, nearly as young cohort was given the call when an emergency came up. Only a quarter of them survived. Their loss was devastating to the community and their overall fight for freedom. It was dampening to everyone's spirit. The new, young cohorts didn't remember those days as they were much too young to understand fully what happened then. Telling them now might not sink in, but no one was going to send them unless it was absolutely necessary.

Chapter 9

Jim and Pete kept watch from the APC's upper turret hatch, though it wasn't much of a turret without a machine gun mounted on it. Mitch drove as they kept pace with the Fifth Cohort. Ahead of them moved the Second Cohort whose task was to engage and kill the guards. Still farther ahead of them were two cars speeding toward the laser unit that had to be destroyed if they were to have any chance of success.

Three other cohorts left even earlier along with two more cars. One was the ramming car and the other was the generator and radio car. They'd support the blocking forces and keep them advised of any changes in the situation.

"Blocking force to liberation force. No change in status. Terrain is good for movement and no Lizzar forces in sight yet. We're about to split up for our zones of control. Over."

Pete answered, "Liberation force. So far, we're on schedule. Our ETA remains firm. We should be at the camp in one hour."

• • •

Mike listened to the calls. Zira stood near her. He said nothing about the fact that Steve hadn't gone out to fight. Nor did he seem concerned that over thirty women were still in camp. After all, many of them were busy teaching reading and other skills to the two cohorts and the breeders who remained behind.

Steve wondered about their strange alliance. He felt somewhat guilty about not going, but was told that there really wasn't going to be room in the APC for him so they could bring back the men they liberated. He didn't know it, but had he gone another five women would have volunteered to ride on the backs of centaurs into battle simply to be near him. Still, he was surprised that eight women from the dormitory had volunteered to ride on the backs of strong, male centaur warriors into battle. They probably wouldn't do much since they were assigned to Frea's Fifth Cohort where they could help deal with the women to be brought back. Except for Priscilla and Sheila, the women from the prison were also riding with them, giving Frea's force fourteen extra pairs of eyes and hands that might be desperately needed.

Zira listened for more information. He didn't much like his new role in the background. Though he knew the men and women advising him were right about not putting the overall leadership in direct jeopardy, he still felt his place was in sight of his forces, if only to inspire them. Occasionally he paced about, careful not to bump into the radio or Mike. He followed her gaze and concluded that she was desperate for Steve's attention. Had he not needed her there to expertly handle the radio, he might have sent the two of them off to fuck each other's brains out. He suppressed a chuckle at the colorful phrase he remembered that had caught on among his warriors and breeders. Had he been cornered into a confession, he would have admitted that he also liked the phrase. Besides, he saw no reason why she couldn't be a breeder as well as their radio technician as it would then fit in better with what his people expected of females who remained in camp.

"Liberation force to all units. The laser is destroyed. I repeat, the laser is destroyed. All units attack, attack, attack."

Zira smiled and sighed with relief. He knew then that his losses would be less than usual. Still, he wished he could see the battle instead of listening to short messages.

• • •

John heard the clanking and engine sounds reverberating through the mine shaft. He wasn't sure whether the clanking was from swords or not, but he felt certain that the engines were from the cars he sent away from Conway before it fell. He turned toward his guard and threw his short iron pry bar at the guard's face. The guard fell and John leaped at him to take a weapon, even if it meant using the pry bar again.

• • •

Cheryl saw the APC and cars entering the compound while centaur warriors, some bearing women, galloped into the camp at a charge. Most of the centaurs wielded bows and arrows that they used quite expertly against the Lizzars who were unable to approach them or engage in close combat. She picked up some of the rocks of ore and threw them at the guards overseeing her and the other women.

Around her, other women followed her example as they pelted the guards from one side while arrows were loosed at them from another. In short order, her guard and others were down on the ground. Those who weren't dead were soon killed by women who bashed their skulls in or picked up their swords to skewer them. More than one woman avenged herself by using a sword to emasculate some of the guards.

As the centaurs carrying women reached them, many of the women dismounted to run over and assist with removing the chains that bound their ankles. Some carried hammers and chisels. They quickly worked at freeing the women so they could be mounted on the backs of waiting centaur warriors whose only task was to spirit them away to safety.

Cheryl waited her turn. As she waited, she glanced around at the melee of fighting still taking place. She hadn't even realized until just then that some of the women in chains were dead, having been too close to their guards to avoid being hacked to death with swords. That was when she realized that those were the guards some women were still beating on, even though they were also quite dead. She went over to one, then another, to calm them and send them over to have their chains removed.

The vision of the APC was still even more marvelous to Cheryl as she realized that it and all of the women who rode in were newcomers. She recognized only some of the men standing in the cars.

Jim hollered, "Where are the men?"

Cheryl shouted back, "They're in the mines! Over there!"

"Thanks! See you back at camp!" Jim shouted as the APC turned and

headed for the mine shafts that burrowed into the side of a steep hill.

• • •

John finished beating on the Lizzar with his pry bar before finally gaining the Lizzar's sword. Knowing that he couldn't do much while still chained, he sat back and worked at breaking just one of the links so he could run. He wondered how the fighting was going outside since he hadn't heard any gun fire as yet. Then it occurred to him that they were probably out of ammunition for the guns by now. He knew that they'd be relying on bows and whatever else they managed to cobble together.

He looked up suddenly as he heard running footsteps coming toward him. Determined not to die sitting down, he stood up and held the sword and pry bar in position to fight. When he saw the naked, bald woman come running to him, he was stunned. He almost had to look at her twice to even be sure she was a woman.

She said, "Come on! We've got an APC outside waiting to get you to safety."

"An APC? An Armored Personnel Carrier?" he asked as she took his hand and began leading him out of the mine.

"Yes, that's what I mean. I'm Connie. I came in the third group from Earth. You can learn about everything that's happened once we get you all to safety."

"Third group? Thanks, Connie. I'm John Weaver."

"You're the coach I've heard about? Wow! Everyone will be glad you're still alive and back safely!" she exclaimed.

"I don't know why. My team lost," he replied.

"No, you didn't. Maybe you and a bunch of others got captured, but you really won the battle. So far, we've kept them from getting any technology from any of the sites."

"I have one question. Why'd you shave your hair off? I can understand why some women shave their underarms, but your head and face, too?"

Connie said, "It wasn't shaved. It was some sort of reaction like happened to the synthetic clothes on two sites. On ours, it was every hair on our bodies that went poof!"

"Will it grow back?"

"We don't know yet. It's been six days so far. There's not hint of any stubble on any of us women or the one man who was with us."

John said, "God, you all must have brought the entire army!" as he

blinked against the daylight and stopped just within the entrance to the mine.

"Close to it."

"Well, you should be concentrating on finding and destroying the tractor beam. If that's not destroyed, we can still lose. Now forget me and get that information to Zira, if he's still alive."

Connie said, "Zira's still alive and back at camp. He controls the battle by radio now."

"You made radios?" he exclaimed.

"No, but we have some now and someone who can fix them. She's at the camp with her own bodyguards to protect her day and night."

"Thank goodness someone used their heads. I made too many mistakes already. We don't need anymore."

Connie said, "Here comes the APC. You can talk to Zira on its radio."

"Yeah, and get these chains off while I'm inside it. Take care of yourself, Connie. You're still a beautiful woman," John said.

"Really? You'd give me a roll in the grass?"

"Sure and I mean it from the bottom of my heart. Thanks for escorting me to the APC and telling me some of what's been going on."

• • •

Zira said, "Hello, John. So good to hear your voice again."

"Zira, you don't have any time to waste. The Lizzar tractor beam site must be found, no matter what the cost. If we don't put it out of commission, the Lizzars will eventually gain the technology they need to even the war back out. With their head start on industrialization, they'll win. The tractor beam site has to be destroyed."

"I think I understand what you're saying. Is it that important that we find the sites now?"

"Sooner or later, the Lizzars will rip off a piece of Earth that we won't reach in time to prevent them from taking whatever technology is on it. When that happens, they're going to catch back up with us and retake the lead. Even if it costs half our force, we must destroy any tractor beam sites they have. Otherwise, we might as well all hold up our hands and surrender now."

Zira said, "In that case, I'll send out patrols immediately to search for the tractor beam site. They'll be instructed to bring back prisoners for interrogation. We'll find it. Put Jim on the radio now, please."

• • •

Zira watched as squads of young centaur warriors went out on their first mission. He hated to send them, but they were all he could spare. He hoped they all returned safely. Even more so, he hoped they returned with information on where the tractor beam unit was located. As well, he still had one squad of centaur warriors out on patrol near the prison and was equally worried about them. Even so, they were experienced and knew what they were up against.

• • •

John stood at the hatch to the APC where he could watch the remaining action while Connie hammered off his chains. Even without any hair, he still found her delightfully sexy in appearance. Consequently, his manhood sprang upward, almost smacking her in the forehead as it did so. When she next gazed up at him after removing the chains from one ankle, she was startled to see his massive male member pointing straight at her.

Connie said, "God, you must have been without a woman for months now. I'm not even sexy looking anymore and you look like you don't mind."

"I wish that was the truth. The sad fact of the matter is the Lizzars forced us to have sex with the women every night for close to two hours before they'd permit us to sleep. It's even possible that they slipped us some fertility drugs because all of the other men and myself found ourselves able to come the entire time after awhile. Maybe I'm just horny from whatever they slipped us, but you are definitely sexy looking. I sure as hell wouldn't kick you out of my bed, even if I wasn't so damn horny."

"My baldness doesn't bother you?"

"Absolutely not! I find you still very beautiful and attractive," he answered.

"If we had time, I'd do more right now to show my gratitude," she replied.

"You don't have to thank me for speaking the truth," he said.

She looked up and smiled at him. "I've got to get this chain off you now."

John turned his head and looked as one girl ran screaming from a mine shaft while holding her arm to stem the bleeding. "There's three Lizzars in this mine! I couldn't fight them all!"

Two nearby centaurs charged for the mine entrance while some women

ran to care for the wounded woman. The two centaurs entered the mine with their bows ready and their swords near at hand.

"I think Earl was in that shaft. I hope they get him back alive," John said.

Connie said, "They'll do their best."

Minutes later, the two centaurs came out with Earl slung over one of them. He was bleeding, but apparently alive. One of the centaurs was likewise bleeding, but capable of caring for himself, though he didn't refuse the ministrations of some of the women who gathered around to help Earl and him. After Earl was bandaged, he was carried over to the APC and set down beside John.

Connie swung the hammer and the last link parted. "Just in time. Now I can begin on his chains."

John asked, "How bad are you hurt, Earl?"

Earl replied, "Not bad, John, but I'm not going to be screwing around tonight. Maybe not for a few nights until my leg is better. Those centaurs sure showed up in the nick of time. Otherwise, I was a goner."

"Looks like we lost a few women. I see two other men. Still some folks unaccounted for. I hope we didn't cost too many casualties to rescue," John said.

Connie said, "It was pretty well planned out. Zira and the others are listening to any ideas we might have for how to fight and where. He's really excited, though he often doesn't show it, about how we're going to defeat the Lizzars in his lifetime. I didn't know we had this many more women on this world."

John asked, "Is that a problem?"

Connie answered, "It's beginning to...No, it is a problem. There simply aren't enough men to go around. I can see that I'm either going to have to share someday or be an old spinster. Being an old spinster isn't what I planned on, but I doubt that anyone will marry me if my hair doesn't grow back."

Earl said, "God, woman, with your body? I'd marry you in a heartbeat. The only thing I have to warn you about is that I want lots of sex."

She said, "John mentioned you all suspect your food was tampered with. I don't think I'd mind if my husband wanted a lot of sex. If he's too much for me, I'll let him marry a second wife to help me at night."

Earl said, "In that case, I'm asking you right now if you'll marry me. I'll understand if you don't, seeing as I'm black. But if you do, I'll sure treat you right. Not just in bed, either. I mean all the time."

Connie said, "Can I think about it some? I promised John that we might do something later. You might not want me then."

"That don't bother me none, woman. We're kind of used to sharing now," Earl said.

"My name's Connie," she said.

"And I'm Earl. If you promised something, then you go ahead and do it. I'm not going to hold that against you if you don't hold all the women I took against me," he said.

"Connie, you don't have to honor me later. Go ahead and marry Earl if you want. Believe me, I've got more than enough women sharing my bed," John said.

"You're not just passing me off because I'm bald?" she asked.

John answered, "No, I'm not. Believe me, I'm only doing this to be honorable so you won't have any interference in your marriage. That is, if you decide to marry Earl."

Earl said, "One thing about John is that he never turns down women. He really is being honorable right now."

Connie said, "I made a promise that I have to live up to. If you still want to marry me after that, then we'll discuss it, Earl."

"Don't need to discuss anything with me, Connie. I like you with or without hair," Earl said.

John asked, "Is Earl's truck still at Conway?"

Earl said, "God damn, I almost forgot about that. Do you think it was too large for the Lizzars to carry off?"

"I'm hoping that they didn't since it would have been difficult to get down without wrecking it. I think if we can get the truck down ourselves, we could put it to some good use," John said.

Earl said, "Sure would be nice to have some privacy occasionally, even if it's only my truck cab."

"I'm not thinking about that. I'm remembering how the Lizzars finally got us by shoving huge ramps up against our town so they didn't have to climb. We held them off fine while they had to climb. We even held them off a little with the Molotovs as they brought the ramps up. I'm still amazed that they managed to get those heavy iron ramps moved so fast," John said.

Earl said, "They're not solid iron. George and the Principal had something to do with the design. That much I do know. I also think they showed them how to properly use wheels."

"That accounts for how they got those heavy ramps into place so easily

despite our defense," John said.

Connie said, "They moved the ramps to the prison and then used them against our dormitory."

"Well, then we need to capture one of those ramps as well. We should be able to modify it and place it behind Earl's truck. That way we can move from island to island," John said.

"Island?" asked Earl.

"Think about it, Earl. Every location they ripped from Earth is probably like Conway since Connie just said they used the ramps at the other two sites. That makes each piece of Earth just like an island on the plains. Until we destroy the tractor beam sites, we need to have access to every island whether the Lizzars are there or not. The only way we're going to accomplish that is to possess our own ramp. Otherwise, we're going to waste valuable time grading a slope for access. I don't like making permanent access routes that the Lizzars can use, too. Your truck is virtually the only vehicle capable of handling one of those ramps. All we have to do is use the ramming car in the lead with you right behind pulling the ramp. The other cars can follow you while the slower APC sticks with the cohorts. When we find a new island under attack, the ramming car makes a path. You follow it in and drop off the ramp when the leading edge reaches the island. Then you drive off behind the ramming car to safety while the other cars charge up the ramp to help defend the new island. While the cohorts, APC, and ramming car fight the Lizzars, the people from the cars load up any technology that can be used, destroy the rest, then make arrangements to bring out the people or defend them until they can make another trip to the island after getting the technology to safety. Once we have the place cleaned out or safe, we'll leave it to the Lizzars," John said.

Earl said, "You're going to have to put armor on my truck. I'm not driving through all those spear-chucking lizards without any protection."

"Absolutely. We'll put armor on your cab to protect you completely. You're too valuable since I don't know anyone else who can drive your truck. Not as skillfully as you, anyway," John said.

Earl asked, "What about fuel?"

John answered, "Unless the Lizzars have destroyed the buried tanks at the gas station, we should have diesel fuel for your truck."

Connie said, "This APC uses diesel and they got their fuel from Conway."

"There! You see! We do have fuel for your truck if it's still there," John

exclaimed.

Earl said, "I guess the Lizzars are still learning about burying treasures. All they know about so far are copper and iron."

"Copper?" asked John.

"Yes, they were mining a vein of copper in my shaft as well as the iron. I broke through to it yesterday and they were all excited about it. I guess the word didn't get to you last night," Earl replied.

"Yes, they would have knowledge about copper if they have electricity. At least, I think they would," John said.

Earl said, "I know for a fact that they have knowledge about several metals. They're very excited about steel and other metals they hadn't seen before we came here."

John stepped into the APC. "I'm going to talk with Jim about making a detour to Conway on the way back. We need to know if your truck is still there or not. It's too valuable to lose. I wish you'd been there to drive it away when we sent off the books we saved. We could have emptied out that library completely and taken a lot more as well."

Jim was talking on the radio. John listened in without interrupting.

"The Lizzars now have bows and arrows! We don't know how they made them, but they have them now! Over."

"Have the centaurs fall back and stay out of range. We're almost through here. Any other developments? Over," Jim said.

"Only one, but it's not very important. They also have some sort of multiple-seated bicycle. It carries five Lizzars, but they don't stand up to ramming. We've taken out a dozen of them so far. Over."

"Good! Keep them from gaining too much ground on the cohorts and don't stay past your safety margin of fuel. When you get to that point, you're to radio us and start withdrawing immediately. We should be finished shortly so you won't have to hold them off very much longer. Over," Jim said.

"Understood, Jim. Out!"

"Sounds like more of George's handiwork," said John.

"More?" asked Jim.

"We believe he's partly responsible for designing the ramps the Lizzars used to capture Conway with. Speaking of which, I'd like to have you detour the force to Conway so we can find out if Earl's truck is still there. If it is, we need to recover it before the Lizzars figure out how to get it down from there. We have more use for it than they do," John said.

"That's not a bad idea since we'll need to refuel most of the cars. We'll

plan for now on heading for Conway unless the Lizzars present some new obstacles. Then we'll see whether we can get past those or not," Jim said.

"Good enough for me. Thanks, Jim," John replied.

• • •

Zira looked up with glee at the return of his patrol to the prison and dormitory. They were all alive and healthy, though they did appear to be tired. He galloped over to meet them rather than make them report to him as their fatigue was evident.

"Over Commander! You didn't have to come out to us!"

Zira said, "Forget that. I'm glad to see you're all safe. How was your mission?"

Squad leader Mira said, "The Lizzars took everything they could find that was loose in the prison and the dormitory. Nothing was left behind but empty walls."

"Everything? What could they do with that useless material?" asked Zira.

Mira said, "We don't know, but we saw signs that large numbers of Lizzars passed there recently. Maybe the day before we reached it."

"Where were they headed?" asked Zira.

"Toward our territory," she answered.

Zira thought momentarily, then having reached a conclusion said, "Alert everyone to prepare for a counter-strike by the Lizzars. Mike! Notify the reserve cohorts to return to camp at once! Tell the other units to hurry back! We may come under attack soon! We have young to protect!"

Mike switched to transmit and said, "Base camp to reserve force. Base camp to reserve force. Over."

"Reserve force, over."

"Over Commander Zira wants the entire reserve force to return to camp to prepare for possible Lizzar counter-strike. Report back at once. Over."

"Understood. Over."

"Base camp to all other forces. Base camp to all other forces. Over."

"This is Blocking force. Over."

"Rescue force. Over."

"Base camp to all other forces. Over Commander Zira wants your forces to hurry back. We may come under attack by a Lizzar counter-strike. Over."

"Rescue force to Blocking force. Withdraw immediately and return to camp. Rescue force is pulling out now. We are heading for Conway to

refuel. Advise you refuel the ramming car before heading for base camp. Over.”

“Blocking force to Rescue force. Understood. We will disengage the enemy now. Blocking force to Base camp. We're on our way. Out.”

• • •

“The APC is needed at the base camp,” John said.

“The APC needs fuel before it can get back to base camp. We're still going to Conway. The cars might make it back without refueling, but they'll be running on fumes by then. It's better that they refuel first. One thing for sure, this counter-strike isn't George's doing,” Jim said.

“No, this would be Paul's doing. He's actually pretty good, considering what he has to work with,” John said.

• • •

Mike packed up her radio and placed it on the back of one of her centaur bodyguards. She mounted on the back of another. Around her, the entire camp busily gathered the pieces of weapons being made for more warriors while sentries were sent out farther to give earlier warning. Even Priscilla went about picking up and packing away newly made arrows to be issued when needed. Zira was nervous as he paced about, wondering if he would have to fight a rear action defense with only a few guards against numerous Lizzars who might overwhelm him and them in seconds. One of the patrols of young centaurs galloped in, their hides sweaty with foam as they sounded an additional alarm.

Zira shouted, “Over here with me! If we have to fight, you'll get your chance!”

The young centaurs wasted no time in running over to stand with Over Commander Zira.

“We saw thousands of Lizzars! Two patrols are attempting to lead them off. We were out of sight and returned to warn you.”

Zira said, “You and they have done well. I hope they are successful and live to tell many stories. There aren't many of us, but we'll give the others enough time to escape.”

One young centaur asked, “What formation will we use?”

Zira looked around at the forty centaur warriors he had available while he considered his options. He finally said, “We'll use hit and run tactics meant for patrols. When they get within range, we'll hit, then run away

from them. Maybe we can tire them out. Mira, put your warriors out on our flanks. I don't want the Lizzars to trap us before we have a chance to do anything to them. The rest of you will stand with me in the center. At least, we still have time. We might not even have to fight them if the camp moves quickly enough."

• • •

Mike leaned over and took the microphone. She switched to send. "Base camp to all other forces. We are moving now. Lizzar position is currently unknown. They may have followed two patrols who are leading them away. Out."

• • •

Zira put his binoculars to his eyes and scanned the horizon. A moment later, he exclaimed, "Damn! They must have cut off the other two patrols! They're heading this way!"

One young centaur warrior whispered, "He used one of those human words."

Another said, "Whatever it means, he must be using it right."

Zira said, "Stand ready to fall back after our patrols pass through. I just hope they don't try to turn around and attack when they see us. We're better off if we can gather our strength together."

• • •

Steve gazed briefly at the small brave band of centaur warriors, then turned and seized a bow and a carefully sewn leaf full of arrows. "Anyone else going to fight for their freedom? I'm not letting the centaurs fight alone."

As he looked at the former college women, his eyes bore into them, showering them with guilt until most of them picked up a weapon and walked over to stand with him.

Steve said, "Now we can't do as much, but we can provide a big surprise for the Lizzars when they get here. Here's what I think we can do..."

• • •

As the tired remnants of two patrols approached, Zira said, "Well done. I am glad you didn't try to fight the Lizzars by yourselves. Now we are

stronger. How far behind you are the Lizzars?"

The squad leader answered, "Not more than two fingers of the sun moving."

Zira said, "Then we still have time. Rest now. You will have need of your strength and energy later."

• • •

Steve caught up to the centaurs moving the camp's possessions. He scanned the various individuals until he spotted the one carrying what he needed. He ran full out to reach the individual centaur and was out of breath when he did.

"What's wrong, Steve? Are the Lizzars close now?"

Steve answered, "Not yet...I need one of those containers...for the battle..."

The centaur replied, "Take it then, if it will help."

Steve grasped the container and staggered back toward the camp.

• • •

Miranda reached Zira. She was almost out of breath.

Zira asked, "Have the Lizzars gotten behind us? Are the young safe?"

Miranda said, "We're all okay. Steve came up with a plan. He wants you to fall back toward the campsite when you withdraw. He's got a big surprise in store for the Lizzars that can even the odds some."

"Very well. We shall do that. You can go back now," Zira replied.

Miranda said, "I'd rather stay and fight with you. Will someone let me ride on him or her?"

• • •

Steve staggered into the camp with the container. The women were busy working as he instructed. As soon as he set the container down, several women carried their modified arrows over to him and the gasoline he had carried back.

Steve said, "Okay, go easy on each arrow. Just enough to keep it burning in flight. I don't want it dripping fire on us before we shoot them off. Debra, you lead half the women to that rise. That will give you more elevation so you can shoot farther. Lenora, you lead the rest of the women over there to that other rise. I'll be near the camp to set off the last of the fireworks. Don't shoot until you have a ride, unless the Lizzars are bearing

down on you.”

• • •

Zira spotted the Lizzars through his binoculars. He could see that they would be within normal eyesight of his force fairly soon unless they had binoculars or rifle scopes with them. If that was the case, he knew they could see him as well, already.

“Can you see them yet, Over Commander?”

Zira answered, “Yes, I can see their front ranks now. Our last sentries are returning now. We grow only a little stronger. Miranda, are you sure Steve's plan will work?”

She answered, “He thinks it will. It's worth a try, isn't it?”

Zira said, “Yes, it's worth a try. If we can cook a thousand Lizzars and chase them off, it will be a great victory for us. If not, then no one will condemn us for losing to such odds as these. Here come the runners from the flanks. Hopefully they will only tell us that they know of our plans and not that the Lizzars are outflanking us.”

• • •

Steve practiced shooting a couple of plain arrows at a log used to cut arrows from. He realized quickly that he wasn't good enough to hit the gas container. Not while far enough away from it to keep from being blasted himself. He ran over to the container and poured some of it onto the grass around it so his target would be larger. Then he ran back and waited.

• • •

Zira ordered, “Fire two shots and withdraw!”

Two volleys of arrows flew out from his warriors at the approaching Lizzar units that marched in orderly formations. A few arrows bounced off armor chest plates. A few arrows found legs or arms. Some even found throats and faces, but only a very few Lizzars fell from the ranks before the centaur rear guard turned and ran out of range. One warrior cried out as an arrow hit him in the rump, but he didn't stop or falter. He kept up with the rest without any complaints beyond his initial cry of pain.

Zira held up his hand after they ran for about a minute. The centaurs turned and faced the oncoming Lizzar units once more. As the Lizzars marched at them, the centaurs rested briefly and readied their next volleys of arrows.

"Fire!" ordered Zira. "Fire and withdraw!"

A few more Lizzars fell from the ranks while his force withdrew at a gallop to put themselves safely out of range of Lizzar return fire.

• • •

Steve watched as the rear guard approached closer and closer to the campsite. With his palms sweaty and his hands nervous, he realized that his plan might not work. He hoped and prayed that he wasn't putting the entire defense at risk because he came up with a stupid idea.

• • •

"Fire! Fire and withdraw!" Zira ordered in sending out two more volleys.

• • •

As Zira's force dropped back to his position, Steve said, "So nice to see you again. We're ready here."

Zira said, "If this works, we'll never fear the Lizzars attacking our base camp again."

Steve said, "I don't think this will stop them from trying again. All it will do is stop them this time. By the way, how good are you with a bow? I just discovered that I'm a lousy shot."

Zira said, "I have some warriors who are very good. Give your arrow to one of them and tell him what to do."

Steve asked, "Who's the best shot here with a bow?"

One centaur said, "Kono's the best shot!"

Steve said, "Okay, Kono, use this arrow to shoot that gas container when the Lizzars reach the campsite. It has to be lit first. You can use my lighter."

Kono said, "I have a lighter, but you're welcome to ride my back and light the arrow. That way, you can advise me when to shoot."

Zira said, "Good idea, Kono! Steve, ride on Kono!"

• • •

Zira ordered, "Fire! Fire and withdraw!"

Steve said, "They can see the camp! They'll believe the rest of our camp is still close because we're still fighting them!"

Zira said, "They appear to be impatient now," after glancing over his shoulder.

Steve said, "I'm counting on that."

Zira ordered, "Halt!"

The centaurs stopped and turned to face the enemy while still in easy arrow range of the camp, but not as far ahead as they used to run.

Steve held up his right hand with his middle finger extended at the Lizzars while shouting, "Fuck you!"

Zira asked, "You wish them sex?"

Steve said, "We use the same words to also mean that we wish them bad luck. It takes a bit of explaining. In fact, I usually don't use such words, but I felt it was appropriate in this situation."

"Over Commander! They are charging!"

Zira looked at the enemy as it reached the edge of the campsite.

Steve said, "Hold the arrow up so I can light it before they block our target, Kono."

Kono held the arrow over his shoulder while Steve flicked his lighter once, twice, then a third time before it produced a flame. He held it to the prepared arrow that caught the flame.

Steve said, "Okay, fire when you're ready!"

Kono put the arrow to the bow and drew back. He aimed carefully at the gas container and then released it. The arrow fell short of the container and the grass that Steve soaked with gas.

Steve said, "We better withdraw now, Over Commander!"

Zira ordered, "Fire and withdraw!"

Arrows were already flying at the centaurs as they loosed another volley at the Lizzars. Two centaurs fell with fatal wounds while the rest turned and ran, some of them suffering wounds that they suffered silently.

The Lizzars ran through the campsite, unaware of the danger the container posed for them. One tripped over it, knocking it over so that it spilled. The gas poured out toward the flaming arrow. It caught and traced a path back to the container. For a while, the container only spewed out flame. Unaware of the true danger, the Lizzars merely avoided it by passing on both sides.

Finally, with a thunderous roar, the container exploded.

Steve glanced over his shoulder in time to see numerous Lizzar bodies flying through the air while a cloud of smoke obscured the area of the explosion. He barely caught sight of flaming arrows hitting in the dry grass on one flank. As his force withdrew, he hoped that each of the women could mount one of the centaurs and escape since he had convinced them to fight.

Zira ordered, "Halt! Prepare to fire volleys!"

As the small force turned to fight again, they could see several small fires burning on the flanks of the Lizzar army. In the center, there was nothing but mass confusion. Dust continued settling. Numerous Lizzars stood around looking at the area of the explosion as they tried to comprehend what took place.

Zira ordered, "Fire four volleys this time! Fire!"

• • •

Dennis said, "Good god, what was that?"

Gail said, "It was an explosion, but whose?"

Dennis said, "I'll try to contact Mike and see if she knows what that was."

He picked up the microphone and switched to send. "Ramming car to base camp. Over."

Mike heard the radio channel open up with Dennis's voice. She reached over for the microphone, almost falling off the centaur she was riding. She caught herself and answered, "Base camp to ramming car. Over."

Dennis asked, "What was that explosion? Over."

She answered, "We're not sure, but I heard that Steve took a five gallon container of gas from one of the centaurs. It might have been that. Over."

Dennis said, "I hope he didn't carry it into their ranks and blow himself up with them. Over."

Mike looked back at the clouds of smoke rising from where the base camp used to be. For a moment, she was horrified to think that Steve might be dead.

Dennis asked, "Are you still there, Mike? Over."

In a hurt, choking voice, Mike answered, "I'm still here. I don't know what Steve did. Over."

Dennis said, "We're almost to you. We can see the smoke now. Over."

"Then head for the smoke. That's where the Lizzars should be at. Over," Mike said.

Dennis said, "Understood. We should be joining the battle within ten minutes. Out."

"We've got to go back and tell them that the ramming car is almost here," Mike said.

The centaur she was riding glanced back at her and said, "No. My orders

are to protect you, to keep you out of the battle.”

She slid off his back and turned to run back toward the camp. He caught up with her and grabbed her around the waist. She struggled and twisted in his arms. When she was facing him a moment later, she tried to kick him between his legs. “Damn it, your balls would have to be between your rear legs! Let go of me!”

“NO! Either get on my back or I'll carry you this way!”

“Then you'll have to carry me this way because I'm not getting on your back,” Mike said.

The centaur said, “So be it,” as he lifted her up and slung her over his shoulder.

• • •

Dennis stood up in the ramming car and gazed out at the thousands of Lizzars. He whistled lowly, then said, “Ramming speed and watch out for the crater.”

Gail said, “Ramming speed it is! God how I love running over pedestrian Lizzars! Hang on! ”

Dennis ducked down so the Lizzars couldn't hit him with any of their thrown spears or slash out with a sword as the car plowed into the ranks of Lizzars. The air filled with Lizzar bodies tossed off by the angled bumpers while other Lizzars tried to get out of the ramming car's path. Their own formations blocked some of them from reaching safety.

Dennis watched the roof in case one or more Lizzars managed to grab hold and climb on. Minutes afterwards, he stabbed upwards with his sword to dislodge one Lizzar soldier who then tumbled off the car into other Lizzars.

• • •

When Gail finally drove away from the Lizzar units, there were several hundred wounded and dead Lizzars lying on the ground. She drove toward Over Commander Zira who was giving orders to his reserve cohort to deploy while the camp continued to distance itself from the enemy.

Dennis stood up and said, “Over Commander, we brought back one of the bows they were using. I found out what they made their bowstrings from.”

Zira asked, “How? I mean, what did they use?”

Dennis said, “Our old clothes. They sliced the material into strips and

twisted it tightly to make bowstrings.”

Zira said, “Now we know why they took everything from the prison and dormitory. We must be more efficient about what we take from now on. I have heard many of your people complain about having no clothes. Now I shall have to insist that all clothes be used for bowstrings if we are to have more weapons than the Lizzars. We cannot expect the other sectors to hold their own against these weapons without having any themselves.”

“Well, I've gotten used to being naked. I guess I'd rather be naked than dead,” Dennis said.

Steve said, “It won't bother me none since I'm a nudist anyway. However, I might be able to better convince some of the newcomers, if we have anymore, that they'll have to live as nudists. That is, if any of you want me to.”

Zira said, “Your assistance will be appreciated greatly in this matter, Steve.”

Dennis said, “I think the Lizzars are still busy regrouping. At the rate they're going, it's going to be dark before they can resume the pursuit.”

Zira asked, “How is your fuel?”

Dennis said, “We're getting low again. The other cars should be along soon. They're working on preparing another weapon to use against the Lizzars.”

Zira exclaimed, “Another weapon? Tell me what to expect.”

• • •

Earl said, “Okay, now shift gears! That's the way, John! I'll make a trucker out of you yet!”

John said, “If I can get this down the hill without flipping us over, we'll do some real good. How's your leg?”

“Forget about my leg. Just shift gears down, again,” Earl exclaimed.

John downshifted once more. The truck's gears ground slightly as John tried to use the clutch and downshift without stalling the engine or causing damage to it.

“Okay, now ease it down the planks! That's it, John! Just keep the wheels straight and go down easy! You're doing fine!”

John asked, “If you're going to do the driving, why am I the one who has to get the truck off the island?”

“Because you need to learn so I'll have a relief driver. Considering what we've been through together, I figured you'd appreciate a soft seat under

your ass instead of that APC or the back of one of the centaurs. I still remember how bad my balls hurt after that first ride," Earl replied.

"Your relief driver? Me?" John exclaimed.

"Yes, you. Now give it some gas. You're doing fine. Don't let the wheels turn or you'll flip the trailer. Okay, okay, give it some more gas. We're almost at the bottom now. This is where we could lose the trailer. Give it enough gas so it stays with us without bottoming out."

• • •

Jim said, "Okay, get the planks up. We're in!"

"Not yet. We're also going to take as many warriors with us as possible. Okay, allies! Load up until we're full. Last warriors up are going to have to be the strongest. They'll have to pull the planks back out so we can unload the APC," John said.

Jim asked, "Can we punch holes in the sides?"

Earl answered, "Cut all the holes you want. We're going to modify the trailer later to carry a ramp."

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Dennis said, "Okay, they're on their way now! We should be able to give the Lizzars a surprise tonight that will keep them from getting any sleep."

Zira said, "Good, we'll continue to use hit and run."

Dennis said, "Don't use any fire arrows until they're almost here. Otherwise, they'll know where we are."

Zira said, "Yes, I know. Right now, we don't want them to see us. It's getting dark and that will favor us moving in closer than before to shoot our arrows."

Dennis said, "Just be sure you remember they can fire larger volleys in return."

Zira said, "We're not going to hit them from the front. We'll try to get them shooting each other by attacking from a flank."

Dennis said, "Good idea. Maybe they'll wipe themselves out."

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Mike looked at Steve as he caught up with her. He smiled at seeing her with her bare ass sticking up in the air over the centaur's shoulder.

"Would you tell him that it's okay to let go of me now?" she asked.

Steve said, "Actually, I kind of like the view. Why are you like that, anyhow?"

"Because I tried to run back to see if you were alive or not. He follows his orders too well."

"I think he should be commended for following his orders. Your job is here with the radio, not running back to check on me. However, thanks for caring about me."

"Please tell him it's okay to put me down. I'll let you have me."

"You already throw yourself at me," Steve said.

"If you don't, I'll tell Priscilla that you want another go with her," Mike said.

"I can almost handle her. She doesn't frighten me. Anyway, from what I've seen, she's quite good."

"Oh, you!"

Steve said, "I think she can ride normally or walk now."

The centaur smiled as he lifted Mike from his shoulder and placed her on her feet on the ground. "She was terribly upset that she couldn't kick me in the balls while I held her in front of me."

Steve exclaimed, "Really? Did you actually try to kick your bodyguard in the balls?"

The centaur said, "She tried, but her leg wasn't long enough."

Mike stood in front of Steve and blushed.

Steve said, "Not very ladylike. I hope you don't try that on me. If you do, I'll spank that pretty ass of yours."

She asked, "You like my ass?"

Steve said, "I think it's gorgeous like the rest of you. Now don't you think we should get on the move before we fall any farther behind?"

Mike reached out, took Steve's face between her hands, and kissed him. "Now I'm ready to move out. I'm sorry I caused so much trouble, but I thought you might be hurt or dead."

Steve said, "I'm glad you care. I'll keep that in mind whenever I have anymore stupid ideas."

"Stupid?" she asked.

"Yeah, I was going to shoot a flaming arrow into the gas can. I practiced shooting at a log, but couldn't hit it. That was from only twenty yards. Kono was the best shot, so he fired from much farther when it came time. However, he missed and we had to retreat before the Lizzars overran us. However, we got lucky. One of the Lizzars knocked over the can, so the gas ignited anyway. Had I actually been able to hit that can from twenty

yards and taken the real shot, I'd have been sent flying over you. That's how stupid I was. I forgot just how explosive gasoline can be."

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Dennis finished filling the fuel tank with the last of the gas carried by several centaurs. He opened the door and went inside as Gail started the engine. "Okay, let's go run over some more pedestrians, honey."

"With pleasure," she replied as she gunned the engine and drove away from the moving camp. "Did you remind them not to throw away the cans? After all, we have a deposit on those."

Dennis said, "They know we can reuse the cans."

• • •

Earl slowed the truck to a stop. "There's headlights over there. We'll have to unload here or face being overrun."

"We made good time. It's still dark. The moons aren't due to rise for maybe another twenty minutes," John said.

Earl said, "You better tell everyone in back to unload now."

John left the cab and walked around to the rear of the trailer. He opened the doors and said, "We're close enough now to unload. First warriors out are to put the planks in place."

The first warrior said, "We'll all jump out, then put the planks in place. None of us wants to try walking down a plank in the dark."

John stepped aside while keeping one door open. The centaurs stepped to the rear and felt around with their feet for the edge and the ground. Within a few minutes, they all stood on the ground. Working together, they pulled the planks from the truck and put those in place for the APC to unload.

Upon hearing the APC, John was certain that the Lizzars could probably hear it. The APC clanked its way to the planks and down to the ground.

"Want to ride with us and see some action?" Jim asked.

"Earl still needs someone to ride with him. Plus we have to shove the planks back into the truck. Okay, warriors, shove those planks back inside. Then you can report to Over Commander Zira," John said.

John hurried around to the cab where Earl waited nervously. Earl asked, "All finished?"

"They're shoving the planks back inside now," John answered.

A centaur appeared at John's window and said, "You're all loaded."

"You heard the warrior. Time to rock and roll!" John exclaimed.

Earl said, "Well, they ought to be able to hear the APC so this isn't going to make much difference." With that, Earl sounded the horn on the truck a couple of times.

"God, that sounds spooky. Do it some more," John exclaimed.

Earl sounded the horn a few more times, then put the engine into gear and drove forward.

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Dennis said, "They're running like scared rabbits! All because of a truck horn! Look at 'em go!"

Gail said, "I see it, even if I don't believe it!"

Dennis said, "They must not have Paul with them. He'd have told them it was nothing to fear."

"That or they're not listening to him in all the confusion," Gail said.

• • •

Zira looked at the battlefield by the light of the three moons that came up shortly after the Lizzars retreated in disarray. Much as he wanted to follow and kill the stragglers, he was still concerned that there might be other Lizzars trying to surround his people, both centaur and human. With his binoculars, he could make out hundreds of bodies. Dust obscured the retreating Lizzars who, he guessed, were probably following the trail of dead bodies they'd left behind them during their offensive. The truck pulled up to a stop beside him. He looked over at it to see John waving at him.

John asked, "Are we in time?"

Zira said, "The Lizzars are in retreat now. We're not sure why yet."

"Probably the APC. I don't know anyone stupid enough to stand in front of one of those," John said.

Zira said, "Maybe, but they'd seen it before. Did you hear that awful sound awhile ago?"

John asked, "What awful sound?"

Chapter 10

John stood beside Jim, Zira, and the cohort leaders as he outlined his plan for modifying the truck.

Zira asked, "So, you feel that we might not find the tractor beam before another island, as you call them, arrives?"

"I think that we'll find one or both at the same time. If we don't, we could be in big trouble. The Lizzars aren't going to fall for running away from a truck horn next time. We're still getting our forces in from the field, so we're not going to do much of anything right now except for scouting," John said.

Zira said, "And making sure the Lizzars don't regroup and try again."

"That, too. I think we have enough force now to hold them off. As well, we can use the truck to carry most of the very young and some of the spare weapons if they do return for a second round. We'll easily outdistance them now. Still, we can't reach the islands without a ramp," John said.

Zira asked, "Won't that keep us from using the truck for other purposes?"

John answered, "Not really. When we put the ramp in place, it will cut down on the capacity by a little over half. However, we'll still have room to carry cargo or passengers in what's left of the trailer. We can use the metal from what we cut off to make lightweight shields your warriors can carry to protect them against arrows. Unless the Lizzars make long bows or crossbows, shields should give our forces some protection against their arrows."

"Long bows? Crossbows?" asked Zira.

John replied, "You'll have to look those up. All I know is that they're more powerful. They're not as powerful as the compound bows a very few of your warriors have, but we can't make compound bows with what's available. We can make crossbows and long bows, I think. That will give us the edge in range or power once more."

Zira said, "I'll have my warriors seek out the information with your teachers. My warriors respect the teachers even more now after yesterday when they came up with a superb plan and put themselves on the front line with us. It really looked like a hopeless situation until they did that and gained us some extra time and distance for the young."

"Well, they knew their lives were equally at risk. We're not always a selfish race, Zira," John replied.

Zira said, "Okay, we shall seek out both the tractor beam and a ramp. I learned yesterday that the Lizzars made their bowstrings from the clothing left behind."

"So that's why they took our clothing," John said.

Zira said, "Yes, it appears so. We got most of the rope, so they had to improvise, as you say. It appears now that we will also have to improvise. I've instructed my warriors to bring back any clothing to use in making our bowstrings since we're nearly out of rope. I have not only my sector to consider. There are other sectors who need weapons like ours if we're to win. You will have to explain to your people that they will have to remain naked."

"I don't think that's going to be much of a problem for us since the Lizzars took all the clothes. Anyone who complains will just have to remember it's the Lizzars' fault," John replied.

"Not just everyone here now. I'm talking about any new people we find. I have seen how your people can disagree on things. Even on wearing clothes. I truly feel that we all have greater need of any clothing that arrives for use in making weapons. I'm hoping that you can help explain this to anyone new who joins us rather than become a Lizzar slave," Zira said.

John stared at Zira for a moment, then said, "I see. Unfortunately, you're right. I guess if it comes to it, we can force them to disrobe and cover them with a thin coating of laser gel. By the time they find out that they weren't in any danger, their clothes won't be of any use except as bowstrings."

"You would lie to your people?" asked Zira.

"If it was necessary to save their lives, I would lie," John answered.

Zira asked, "Won't that diminish your power as one of their leaders?"

"Me? A leader? I thought Jim was our leader now," John exclaimed.

"I don't have the respect or control you exercise over your group. I don't even have it from all of my group. If anyone's in charge of us, you are since you've got the majority of votes. I've also heard how you organized the defense of Conway. I don't see how anyone could have done better," Jim said.

"I think others could have. Don't forget, I lost. That wasn't exactly a winning season," John said.

"I don't see that as a loss. You and a lot of others were captured, but you safely evacuated the books and cars. The way I see it, you deprived the Lizzars of what they were truly after. You didn't lose, you won," Jim said.

Zira said, "We feel the same way. The object of the battle was your technology. We have it, therefore we won. That was your victory, John.

Apparently you're the only one who feels that it was a defeat. From what I see, Jim is right. More people respect and follow your orders better than any other human."

"That's why I'm not going to argue with what you think of. As far as I'm concerned, you're the leader of our overall group. I'll gladly serve as your second-in-command," Jim said.

Zira asked, "What is this second-in-command? Is this some other rank we don't know of yet?"

"In a way, yes. I guess it's difficult trying to absorb a couple of thousand years of knowledge in only a few months," Jim said.

"Okay, then since I'm in charge, I'd like to make a recommendation that we find another more suitable campsite where we can mount a static defense against any further Lizzar attacks. It must have plenty of food and water nearby that we can circle with lots of traps to kill unwary Lizzars with. What I'd really like is someplace with caves or a cliff where we can give ourselves an elevation advantage for shooting at the enemy," John said.

Zira said, "I think I know of several such places. We shall move to the nearest. If it's not suitable, then we'll go to the next and the next until you are satisfied."

"In the meantime, you're also going to send out patrols to search for the tractor beam, a ramp, and more islands?" John asked.

"I already have out several patrols, but I will send more," Zira said

"The Lizzars are bound to bring in one more island before we stop their beam. I'll give some thought to how I'll tell any new people that they have to be naked while I take care of some unfinished business," John said.

Zira said, "Will you be leading your people into battle? If not, then I should be permitted to be present."

"Seems reasonable that one of us should be present. I guess it's going to have to be me. After all, I'm playing the heavy when it comes to explaining about our required nudity," John said.

Zira said, "Ah well, at least I had one last battle while defending the base camp."

"I suspect that you'll have more of those to come. It's clear to me that the Lizzars will try again. Your experience and leadership will be necessary to successfully defend both our peoples," John said.

Zira said, "Rather than tire the young, I'd like to make the move to our defensive location gradually. We rarely move very far because of concern for our young."

"Well, since most of our people will have to walk, it's probably not a bad idea to make this a gradual move, provided we have plenty of security in place."

Zira said, "I now have three cohorts to provide security along with your people who willingly fought with us two days ago. Unfortunately we have no new information on what we're searching for."

"In that case, I'm going to head out with some of the cohorts in another two days, once some more of them are back and rested. I want to see the prison and dormitory. It just seems strange to me that the Lizzars brought back two pieces of Earth in one place and now the tractor beam isn't anywhere to be found. Perhaps we don't know what we're looking for," John said.

"We're looking for a tractor beam, John."

"What I mean is that we still don't know what the device looks like. We could have seen it before and walked right past without knowing because we weren't looking for it specifically before," John said.

"Ah! Now I understand you. Yes, you should observe those and look over the area. You might see something that we failed to recognize. I will make cohorts available," Zira replied.

Chapter 11

"Uniform for today is fatigues! Hustle it up! Formation in fifteen minutes! We have war games today! Upper classes against the lower classes. I want to see everyone hustling!"

Drill Sergeant Ray Grim glanced down the hallway as doors opened in response to his bellowing. He wondered how well the war games would go considering that the first women accepted at Judgment Academy would be participating in their first war game. He still couldn't believe that the academy had accepted fifteen girls to wear the proud gray uniform of Judgment Academy. He was pissed off as well because he was in charge of all of them in response to his earlier statements. Ray regretted making some of those statements only because he was now their primary drill sergeant. It was his responsibility to inspect them and their quarters along with five weakling boys whom he felt didn't stand a chance of finishing the academy's first year.

Truthfully, he didn't feel any of the women stood much of a chance of completing the first year, either. What rankled him the most was that he was ordered to see to it that at least half the women made it that far without resorting to cheating or padding their grades. From what he'd seen of them so far, he just didn't think it was possible.

Still, they had managed to handle the classroom assignments. As well, he had taught them how to stand in a formation and march. He had to admit that he'd been lucky that none of them had shot anyone on the practice range where he feared the worst would happen.

The only area they were totally deficient in was physical conditioning. They lagged behind the rest of the class in everything. Running five miles, doing pushups and pull ups, throwing. Anything he could name requiring physical effort saw his squad at the bottom of all the scores.

One of the women ran from the common shower area. Her towel slipped and fell from her. Grim didn't avert his eyes in the least as she awkwardly slid to a halt. "Pick up that towel, soldier! And quit running!"

Had he been on the next floor with the men, not that his boys were yet in that category, he would have gladly handed out demerits for running inside the building. He knew he didn't dare be so free with demerits against the women, considering his orders were to see that at least half of them finished their first year. She bent down with water still dripping from her body as she picked up her towel while her ass faced Ray. He stood stoically, not permitting his face to show the slightest interest in her nude body as he observed his cadets.

"Hustle it up, Martine! We've got a war to fight today! Or do you think they're going to hold off the war so you can paint your nails?" he growled at the woman.

"No, Sergeant, Sir!" she hollered.

"Then move your ass and get into your fatigues!"

"Yes, Sergeant, Sir!"

He watched her grip the towel loosely around her. One breast flopped out as she hurried to her room to dress. Ray resented the fact that on inspection days he had to inspect panties, bras, and stockings instead of boxers, teeshirts, and socks. Worse yet, he had to show them how to arrange their clothing on their first day at the academy while they giggled and snickered. His only consolation was that they rarely giggled or snickered anymore and often referred to him as a "grim ray of doom" whenever he wasn't around.

He checked his watch, then hollered, "Ten minutes! Hustle up, soldiers!"

The war's going to get here before you're ready! Then what will you tell the people who depended on you to protect them?"

Two of the women made their way past him in the hallway. He glared at them with the same contempt he felt for the five boys assigned to his care. If anything, they couldn't bitch about being treated any worse. Ray made certain of that. He expected exactly the same from them as from any boy who wanted to become a man. However, he knew the girls could never become men if only because they lacked certain qualifications and wore the wrong clothes. Several more women made their way past him. He checked his watch once more. "Five more minutes!"

Ray turned with military precision and strode to the door. He exited their hallway and crossed over to the next door. He opened it and hollered, "Five minutes left! Don't disappoint me by being one second late! You really don't want to disappoint me!"

Three of his boys quickly walked past him. Another peered out of his room while buttoning his shirt.

"Where's Wallensky?"

"Sergeant, Sir, he's already downstairs ready for formation!"

Ray said, "Really? He got out first? There may be hope for him yet. Don't stand there! Get hustling!"

Ray turned once more with precision and strode back to the women's hallway. He entered and stopped a few feet away from the doorway so he wouldn't block it. He glanced at his watch. "Two minutes! I better see some soldiers about to leave for formation as I pass by the rooms!" he bellowed before he strode down the hallway. He peered into each open doorway, checking to see if anyone was still dressing. He stopped suddenly at the third doorway and stared at the woman for a moment before he bellowed, "What in blazes is that for?"

"Sergeant, Sir, it's underarm deodorant!"

"I can see what it is, Martine! The enemy will be able to smell you from a mile away! Get your shirt on! Don't let me see you using that again when we have field exercises! Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Sergeant, Sir!"

"Move it, Martine!"

He stepped out of her way as she hurried for the hallway door while buttoning her shirt. Sergeant Grim resumed checking the rooms with the minute he had left before he turned and made his way to the hallway door.

Sergeant Grim glared momentarily at his platoon as they stood at ease in formation. Then he strode to his place in front of them and assumed a similar position in preparation for morning reveille. The Commandant made his way down the steps from his office to take his place and participate in the ceremony. At that moment, the adjutant called the units to attention. Sergeant Grim repeated the orders in military manner as the Commandant took command of his troops.

Moments later, the Commandant ordered, "Battalion...about face!"

The assembled troops responded with military precision as the orders were repeated by their unit leaders. They then faced the flag, ready to be raised.

"Present...arms!"

The men and women saluted in respect as the flag was raised. The academy cannon fired once while music played over an intercom. The flag was halfway up when a blanket of fog suddenly fell over the compound. The music stopped with the same suddenness. While the men at the flagstaff continued to raise the flag, the men and women wondered how anyone would know that the flag was completely raised.

A voice hollered from the office, "Colonel, we've lost all power."

Colonel Mark Clark Smith, the Commandant of Judgment Academy, ignored the remark while he continued to hear the missing music in his mind. When he was certain that due respect had been shown to the flag, he ordered, "Port...arms! Battalion...about face! Parade...rest! Platoon leaders, front and center!"

The platoon leaders made their way to him, partly by experience in taking the same positions so many times before and partly by where they remembered his voice coming from. Still, with the fog, they couldn't reach him anywhere near as quickly as usual.

"Sergeants, it appears that we might have a problem. Anyone hear a weather forecast for fog today?" Colonel Smith asked.

Sergeant Lott stated, "It's supposed to be clear and sunny today, sir. There wasn't any mention of fog."

Smith said, "Then we'll hope that this burns off soon. The ambulance is here. When I dismiss the formation, see to loading your troops on the carriers. Then put out road guards with safety vests and flashlights in front of the convoy. Put extra lights on the rear of the last carrier. I don't want the ambulance running into it. We might not reach the field as quickly as planned, but we'll show these cadets that fog isn't considered reason

enough to halt an operation. Modify it, yes, but halt, no. Close the distance between vehicles. See to it that the radio channel is kept clear unless you're coordinating movement through the fog. Once the fog dissipates, we'll return to normal operations. Vehicle spacing included. Any questions, gentlemen? If not, see to it that your men, uh, and women draw their weapons and report to the proper troop carriers. Post!"

The sergeants returned to their places as best they could. Moments later, Colonel Smith roared, "Battalion...attention! Adjutant...post!"

Having turned over the command of the cadets, the colonel left the formation while the adjutant took over the troops.

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Sergeant Grim said, "Keep it close! When you receive your weapon, bring it to me for inspection. I don't want to see anyone removing the muzzle suppressor. The blanks we're firing can kill or wound a person if the suppressor is removed and you aim and fire at someone. It can do so even from ten meters away! This may be only a war game, but you can still be hurt if you do not follow safety procedures. Step up to the armory window and sign for your weapon! Make sure you verify the serial number before you sign for your weapon! Do so quickly and efficiently! First soldier, step up to the window!"

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Sergeant Grim wondered if he was right to take his station in the last APC with ten women. He wondered if he should be in the one with five men and five women, instead. He felt as if he was damned if he did, damned if he didn't. On a clear day, he'd have some sense of control as he'd be able to see the other APC in front once the vehicles spaced themselves.

The radio blared with a voice through the static, "Move out!"

Barely one minute went by before the voice over the radio ordered, "Convoy, halt! All sergeants to the front on the double!"

Ray wondered if one of the road guards had been run over. If so, there would be hell to pay. There had been injuries before at the academy, but no one had been killed since he became a staff member. He climbed out of the hatch and down to the asphalt. Ray jogged toward the front of the column, careful to avoid the vehicles when they loomed up out of the fog, barely visible only because of their extra lights. Ray counted the vehicles as he passed them, finding most of them had barely moved forward from their

starting position. His own hadn't even moved out but a few meters from where his soldiers mounted them. As he went farther along, there was a bit more space until he reached the sixteenth APC and found the rest of the sergeants as well as the two road guards standing about beside the colonel's jeep.

"Sergeant Grim reporting."

"Good, we're all here now. Gentlemen, follow me. Watch your step. We have a major problem confronting us," Colonel Smith said.

Ray followed the colonel as he led the group away from the convoy along the road. As they walked, the colonel spoke. "It's a damn good thing we put road guards out. It's another damn good thing that they used their heads and stopped the convoy immediately. Sergeant De Long, your men are to be commended for using their heads today. They have saved a number of lives, including mine, by their quick thinking and action. Commendations will follow."

"Thank you, sir," De Long replied

"Okay, very slow here, gentlemen. You'll be able to see through the fog in a moment. I suggest no one try to get to the edge. It's jagged and loose enough that it might collapse," Smith said.

Ray edged forward until he could see through the fog. He stared in stunned silence.

"Now you know what our major problem is. We will shut down all the vehicles and have all the troops dismount. From there, take them to classrooms where you will give them alternate assignments to keep them busy. Those staff members not giving instruction are to report to my office where we will discuss our situation and determine if there is anything we can do about it," Colonel Smith said.

"Sir, I'll have the armory open to receive weapons by the time they reach it," Sergeant Pullen said.

"Yes, have your soldiers turn in their weapons first. For the time being, not one word about this to anyone," the colonel said.

Sergeant De Long asked, "What about the two road guards? They know what we just saw."

"Have them report to my office. I'd rather not put them in a position of starting rumors, accidentally or otherwise. We'll find something there for them to do. I also want the rest of the staff to report to my office. Sergeant Pullen, I'll leave that task to you. Now let's get back to our soldiers and get started on our assignments. Report back to your units," Smith said.

Ray turned and walked with the group back to the jeep. He continued on past, resuming a slow jog to make up for the extra distance he had to travel. Reaching his first APC, he climbed up to the open hatch and looked in.

"Everyone is to dismount, return to the armory, and turn in your weapons. As soon as you accomplish that, you are to report to your classroom for instruction. Dismount!"

As he made his way to his second APC, he realized that his soldiers would be first in line as it was too foggy for anyone to run safely. Still, he could hear from the sounds carrying through the fog that some soldiers did try only to trip and fall. He could tell that some of the other sergeants weren't going to be happy with the soldiers of theirs who dropped their weapons that he heard clattering against the asphalt. He climbed up his second APC and repeated his message. Moments later, his last soldiers were dismounting the APC and heading for the armory. He followed in their wake simply to see that they all reached the armory before he headed for the colonel's office.

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"I had no idea the fog would get inside the buildings and be this thick. I can't even see the light from our flashlights reflecting off the sword display. Hopefully, we're all here now so we can get on with solving our situation," Colonel Smith said.

Sergeant De Long asked, "Solve? How? We don't have anyway of making this academy fly back to Earth, sir."

"Granted, we can't solve it in that manner. However, we have a hundred and sixty cadets and ourselves to provide for. So, by solve, I mean that we need to put together a plan for dealing with the situation as it stands," Smith said.

Sergeant Grim asked, "Do we know how much of the Academy is still here?"

The colonel said, "Good question, Sergeant Grim?"

Ray answered, "Yes sir. It was I who said that."

"Okay, some of your voices are a bit distorted by this fog. I think you've just given us a task to apply our two road guards toward answering. Sergeant De Long, have your two men move out, carefully I might add, and reconnoiter the area. We need to know just how much of the Academy is with us. They're to report back here directly upon completion. Go ahead and

give them those instructions. You can catch up on the discussion when we summarize everything," Smith said.

De Long answered, "Yes sir."

"Miss Wade, are you recording all this?" Colonel Smith asked.

She answered, "I'm writing it down, but I'm not sure my notes will be much good. The paper is getting pretty soggy from exposure to this fog."

Smith said, "Just do your best. Sergeant Pullen, are you here yet?"

There was no answer.

"I guess he's still busy receiving rifles. Did anyone notify the ambulance crew? I almost forgot about them," Smith said.

There was still no answer.

"Sergeant Lott, notify the ambulance crew to report here. I don't want them driving off into space. They need to know what's happening," Colonel Smith said.

"Yes sir," Lott replied.

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"Sergeant Pullen's here now, sir."

"Good. Sergeant Pullen, you know what we're facing. I need an accurate inventory of what we have to rely on. I realize that you can't see much inside your supply room or the armory with this fog inside the buildings and only flashlights to work by. However, I need to know as soon as possible about those items that may be critical to our survival. This is basically the same information I requested from the Mess Sergeant. I need to know what we have left to survive on so we can begin rationing," Smith said. "So far, our gathered opinion is that we're going somewhere. There's no telling how far or how long it will be before we reach our destination. Sergeant Lott is out trying to determine how fast we might be going. It might be useless information, but it could turn out useful in determining how long we might have to ration our supplies. Before you begin the inventory, you're to issue sidearms with live ammunition to every staff member. I hope we don't face a panic among our soldiers once they learn of our situation. However, if we do, I don't intend for us to be caught with our pants down around our collective knees. When you finish issuing weapons, begin your inventory."

Pullen replied, "Yes sir."

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Ray felt the weight of the familiar holster attached to his web belt. He

hoped that he wouldn't be the first staff member who might have to use his weapon to restore order. However, he suspected that he might as he was certain that his platoon with fifteen girls would probably be the first to panic once they learned they were no longer on Earth. The youngest cadets would almost certainly be the first to question any authority as it wasn't as deeply ingrained into them.

He wished that Sergeant Lott had determined something more specific about their speed other than "impossible to believe." After all, they had little choice but to believe that they were exceeding the speed of light. Ray knew that wherever they were going, they were going toward it very fast. If they hit anything, they might not even feel it.

• • •

Lunch was difficult at best. Ray followed his platoon through the soup-thick fog that a few cadets joked about being on the menu. They received their food which wasn't the usual hot meal because there wasn't any power. The meal could have been cooked with the portable field mess. However, Colonel Smith had rationalized that everything should be strictly conserved beginning immediately. Ray couldn't argue with the reasons for doing so as it was close to how he might have decided. He took his tray and made his way to the usual table where his cadets stood waiting for him.

"Seats," he spoke, loudly enough for them to know he was at his place.

"Sergeant, sir, Cadet Martine, wishes to speak."

"Permission granted," Ray said.

"Sergeant, sir, why are all the staff wearing side arms?" she asked.

Ray stated, "I'm not at liberty to discuss the matter. Everyone please bow your heads for our prayer. Father in heaven, guide us on our journey so that we might make the right decisions for ourselves. Amen."

The fog dissipated almost as quickly as it dropped into place. Light blossomed into the mess hall permitting the cadets and staff to see each other for the first time in hours without standing within three feet of each other.

Colonel Smith stood and said, "Staff, assemble outside. Bring something to eat if you wish."

Ray stood up, taking an apple with him to give his stomach something to work on.

• • •

Colonel Smith stared out at the clouds and blue sky. "Well, it appears that we're about at our destination. Sergeant De Long, would you and your two soldiers please reconnoiter the edge to see where we might be?"

"Yes sir! With pleasure!" De Long answered. Sergeant De Long ran to the office where the two young men were kept separated from the other cadets. He emerged a minute later with them at his sides. They looked around and then sprinted toward the nearest edge. After reaching it, they stood only a foot away from the absolute edge and stared down. Two minutes later, one cadet ran back to where the Colonel and his staff stood discussing possible options.

"Sir, Sergeant De Long sent me back to report that we're landing near two other buildings sitting on high rises. We also saw thousands of people below."

"Those must be from some of those other disappearances we've heard about and discussed. Our guess-timate that we'd wind up near them appears to be correct. Cadet, could you make out anything about the people below? I don't remember that many people had disappeared," Colonel Smith said.

"No sir, they were still too far down for us to make out clearly. If some of them weren't moving, we might not have figured them for people at first. They looked more like markings arranged in a semi-circle from our point of view."

Smith said, "Markings? Like symbols of a language?"

The cadet answered, "No sir, they looked more like..."

Three shots interrupted him as he and everyone else turned to stare at the edge where Sergeant De Long was firing his side arm at something out of sight. He was clutching the other cadet who was slumped against him and backing away slowly.

"Something's terribly wrong. Go help Sergeant De Long, son," Smith said.

Colonel Smith walked behind the running cadet toward Sergeant De Long. Smith said nothing about his staff following him.

Sergeant De Long hollered, "They fired arrows at us! Cage is hit!"

Smith stopped and stared at the cadet who was carried back by Sergeant De Long and the other cadet. Smith was already close enough that he could see the arrow in Cage's body. The colonel said, "Sergeant Lott, get the ambulance attendants on the double. Sergeant Pullen, open the armory immediately. Issue weapons with live ammunition and without

suppressors to every cadet. See to it that everyone gets a full combat load to include grenades. Sergeants, move your cadets out of the Mess Hall and over to the armory. Have them take their weapons without worrying about stupid serial numbers. We don't have time for that! Move out, gentlemen!"

Ray turned and ran for the Mess Hall. As soon as he hit the door and entered, he shouted, "Company D, Second Platoon, fall out to the armory and draw weapons! On the double!"

He held one door open while another sergeant held the other door open. Within moments, the cadets jumped up from their seats and ran for the exit. When one of his cadets reached the door, Ray said, "Hold this open until all the cadets are out," before exiting and running back to the colonel's side for further instructions.

Colonel Smith waited a few moments, apparently deep in thought, before he spoke to the sergeants who were returning for orders. "Okay, I don't know if they're the ones who brought us here or not. However, they want to shoot arrows at us. That is an act of war. Sergeant De Long, was there any sign of life on those other pieces of Earth?"

"We saw none, sir," De Long replied.

"Then we'll have to conclude that they were either captured or wiped out by these hostile people," Smith said.

De Long said, "They're not people in our sense of the word. They looked more like lizards, sir."

Smith said, "People or lizards, they're carrying and using weapons. That indicates to me that they can be fought and killed. Each platoon is to designate one member to each APC as a driver as before. Assign another two individuals to mount and man machine guns on each vehicle. Did you see any armored vehicles, Sergeant?"

"No sir. Only thousands of lizards with spears, swords, and bows," De Long answered.

"Okay, we'll establish a perimeter around the buildings and the flag pole. Sergeant De Long, place your platoon on the left side of the flag. Sergeant Lott, the right side..." Colonel Smith went down the order of platoons until he reached Sergeant Grim's platoon. Smith asked, "Do you think your platoon can fight?"

Ray answered, "I don't think we have a choice. Where do you want us, sir?"

"At the armory. For now, they'll be my reserves. They can carry ammo to the others in the meantime," the colonel replied.

Ray barely kept his disgust concealed. "Yes sir."

• • •

From his position at the armory, Ray watched as the majority of APC's and platoons hurried to their designated defensive positions. His women drove their two APC's almost up to the armory, bracketing the door to the armory with a defensive shield. Shortly after a slight rumbling indicated that they'd landed, the radio came alive in both APC's.

"They're coming over the edge now! They're shooting arrows at us and throwing spears!"

Colonel Smith's voice came across the radio saying, "Open fire!"

The ragged sound of gunfire carried across the air to everyone in the compound as it drilled home the inescapable fact that they were in a real fight for their lives.

From his position, Ray could see the enemy coming over the edge just over 300 meters away from the flag. He watched them gather together and then charge over the distance separating them from the upper class men beside the flag. They closed to half that distance before Sergeant De Long ordered his cadets to open fire. The sound of gunfire was even louder to Ray, along with another sound it took him a moment to figure out. He reached his conclusion just as the radio blared out, "They're wearing chest armor!"

Colonel Smith ordered, "Then fire at their heads and legs or use grenades!"

Short bursts of machine gun fire punctuated the ragged sounds of assault rifles as each cadet found his target and fired.

"Sir, they're gathering for a mass charge! We could sure use something heavier against them."

Smith ordered, "Stand your ground! Sergeant Grim, have your platoon set up mortars in front of the armory on the APC's!"

Ray ordered, "Grab the mortars! Get them out front! On the double! Martine, Wallensky, get mortar rounds from Sergeant Pullen!"

Ray took the first mortar tube and shoved it up onto the nearest APC. He climbed up and reached down for the base plate. Quickly, he assembled the first mortar while some of his cadets put a second mortar on top of the other APC. He climbed down, went over, and climbed up onto the second APC to assemble the second mortar.

Ray ordered, "Form a chain and hand out mortar rounds. Have Sergeant Pullen come out to man the other tube! Give me that handset!"

The radio came alive as Colonel Smith ordered, "Send over some artillery rounds and a shovel now!"

Sergeant Grim looked down, accepted the first rounds of mortar ammunition, and said, "Ivey, the colonel wants a shovel and some artillery rounds. Get them to him on the double. Take Jones with you to help carry them!"

He watched as his two boys ran inside the armory to get what was needed while Sergeant Pullen climbed aboard the other APC.

Pullen asked, "You want to cover the front or rear?"

Ray said, "We'll just cover whatever coordinates we're given." Pressing the handset, Ray said, "Sergeant Grim ready to fire mortar rounds. Over."

Several voices came over the radio at the same time. They settled down a moment later when Colonel Smith ordered them to go in Company order starting with the most junior.

With the coordinates set on the gauges, Ray dropped the first mortar round into the tube. It shooshed out, arced high over the armory out of his sight, and impacted moments later.

"Fire for effect!" came over the radio.

Ray moved the gauge one click and dropped another round into the tube. It followed the first on a similar trajectory. Another round went out of Sergeant Pullen's mortar. More impact sounds followed.

Ray was too busy taking fire requests to see at first what Colonel Smith had in mind. He didn't look up until he heard the cannon fire while the sound reverberated a moment later against the buildings. He was surprised to see a huge swath cut through the charging lizard people. He dropped another mortar round and glanced up in time to see the colonel slamming the breech closed while Ivey shoveled in gravel before Jones tamped it in with a bore cleaning rod usually kept out only for display purposes. The colonel and two men manually shifted the cannon's aim. Then the colonel fired it once more, cutting another huge path through the charging lizard people. Ray was only barely aware of Sergeant De Long ordering, "Fix bayonets!"

• • •

John ordered, "Halt! Shut off the engine!"

His APC slowed to a halt while around him the cohorts and other vehicles also stopped. One of the cars revved its engine.

"Shut off your engines and listen!" John shouted.

Across the plains came the dull sound of thunder. John glanced around at the sky, searching for signs of a storm. The sky was clear with only a few clouds. Then it occurred to him that the sounds were coming from the direction of the prison and dormitory. He picked up his radio handset. John said, "APC to Generator car. Scout forward with the ramming car all the way to the prison. Report on what you see. Make it a fast trip. Over."

"Generator car to APC. Acknowledging. Out."

Jim asked, "What about our old frequency? The one that Mike thinks is linked to us being here? If the sound is coming from someone new, they might still have their radio in operation."

John replied, "Okay, switch us to that frequency. Uh, let me tell the others that we'll be out of touch for a moment. APC to all forces. We are checking out our old frequency. Will contact you in a few moments. Out."

Jim reached over and set the dials to the frequency they felt was connected to their trip from Earth.

"All platoons fall back. Keep your fire up...Bravo Company needs more ammunition! Ammunition runner on the way!"

John turned and looked at Jim. "It is someone new. Let me contact them first. Then put us back on the other frequency so we can tell everyone to change over."

"Go ahead," Jim said.

John asked, "What do I say?"

"They sound like they're military. Just say that reinforcements are on the way and warn them not to shoot us," Jim suggested.

John pressed the microphone switch, then said, "Attention newcomers from Earth. This is John Weaver. Reinforcements are on the way to your location. Please don't shoot us when we get there. Over."

"Who? All units stop transmitting. Someone's trying to contact us. Go ahead whoever you are. Over."

"This is John Weaver, formerly of Earth, telling you that reinforcements are on their way to help you. Just don't shoot us when we arrive. We will hit the Lizzars from the backside. Over."

"This is Colonel Smith, Judgment Academy. How long will it be until you arrive? Over."

John answered, "Our first units will arrive in less than fifteen minutes. More will arrive hourly. I have to switch channels to notify my forces. Out."

Jim switched the frequency and then nodded.

"All units switch your radios to the frequency used when we arrived here. If you need assistance in changing channels, contact Mike first. Mike,

can you scan all frequencies? Over," John said.

• • •

Mike switched to transmit and said, "Sure, my radio can scan. What's happening? Over."

"We've got newcomers with radios tuned to the old channel. I had Jim help switch to it just moments ago. You might have to help some of us change channels or scan for other calls. Over."

"Okay, I'll be scanning all the bands. If anyone needs help, just let me know. Over," Mike said.

"Tell Zira that we're going to need more forces quickly. We have a major battle going on now. My force is heading out to help the newcomers from Earth. Over."

Mike answered, "Understood. I'll send someone to tell Zira immediately. Over."

"I'm switching to the other channel now. Out."

• • •

"All allied forces, listen up! We have newcomers to assist. All vehicles move out at top speed to attack the Lizzars. Over," John said.

The one remaining car with John's APC sped up and left a cloud of dust in its path as it raced to join the other two cars sent forward to scout. The APC continued to move at the pace of the centaur cohorts assigned to the mission.

"We don't have much ammunition," Jim said.

"I know that, Jim, but we'll have to use it. Maybe the improvised shotgun loads will work with what you brought back from the prison."

"I sure hope so. It's not going to be easy loading the shot first and then the shell while we're moving."

"We'll just have to do our best. Hopefully Zira will send more centaurs in the truck," John said.

"Do you really think twenty more warriors will really help?" asked Jim.

"Better than not getting twenty more real fast," John replied.

• • •

"All units, fall back. Don't let the lizards engage you in close combat. They're wearing armor."

"This is John Weaver, Colonel. I suggest you have your people fight

from inside your buildings if they're intact and any vehicles you might have. Don't leave your wounded behind. The Lizzars don't take wounded prisoners. They hack them to death. If you have any trucks, try running over the Lizzars if you have the room to maneuver. Over."

"Smith to Weaver. Acknowledge. I'm ordering my forces to fall back to the buildings now. Do you know if the enemy has any armor? Over."

John replied, "Not that I know of, but they do have lasers. Over."

"Did you say lasers? Over."

"Affirmative. I said lasers. Be advised they have very few portable laser units and those can be knocked out with long range rifle fire. Over," John answered.

"Understood. We don't see any lasers yet. Thank you for coming to our assistance. Over," Smith said.

"You'll only see three cars at first. The rest of us can't get there as fast. We're running as fast as we can. Over," John said.

"You're running? How far away are you? Over."

John looked at Jim with a puzzled look on his face. John asked, "How far away are we?"

"About ten or twelve miles."

"How long will it take us to get there?" asked John.

Jim answered, "About forty minutes without tiring out the centaurs. You and I can be there in twenty-five if we leave them behind."

"Will we be much good by ourselves?" asked John.

"Well, we'll be safe enough. We should be able to run down some Lizzars."

"I'll tell Frea that we're leaving them behind since we can make better speed," John said.

"If you do, they'll try to keep up. Remember, we have only two cohorts with us. They'll be facing thousands of Lizzars. We're doing them a favor by not rushing into battle," Jim said.

John transmitted, "We'll be there in under an hour, Colonel. Over."

"I think we can hold out that long. Thank you, again. Out," Smith said.

• • •

"Generator car to APC! Over."

"APC here. Go ahead. Over."

"John, the Lizzars are using ladders now. They're not using any ramps. We're not yet close enough, but the area the Lizzars took this time is as

big as Conway, maybe more. Over.”

John hesitated momentarily before replying. “Understood. Do what you can to slow down the Lizzars. And be careful. Out.”

“Well, that seems to tell us what happened to the ramps. They must have figured out that the ramps helped us more than them,” Jim said.

“Looks like we still have a truck and trailer, though. If we modify it with holes along the sides of the trailer, we could put a lot of people inside with bows and still use it offensively.”

“That might work. At least, we'll still have it for carrying centaur young if we have to abandon camp again,” Jim said.

• • •

Dennis said, “Okay, Gail, charge!”

“Okay, honey, hang on! Look out pedestrians! Here I come!” Gail shouted.

• • •

“Base camp to APC. Over.”

“APC here. Go ahead, base camp. Over.”

“Zira is sending four more cohorts to you and moving the camp once more. Over.”

“Does that mean he's using the truck? Over.”

“Affirmative. He's using the truck. Do you need it? Over.”

John replied, “I was hoping that he'd send some of the reinforcements in the truck. Over.”

Mike answered, “I'll ask, but I don't think he'll agree. Over.”

“Do that, please. Out,” John said.

• • •

Dennis slashed upwards at the Lizzar who clung to the car by his fingers on the open edge of the roof. A moment later, the Lizzar went tumbling off while some of his fingers fell into the car. Dennis picked one off his lap and tossed it out.

“They're doing something up ahead. I can't tell what. I think they're carrying one of those ladders,” Gail said.

• • •

“Generator car to APC! Ramming car is out of commission! They're being

swarmed by Lizzars! Over!”

John asked, “APC to generator car, can you get to them? Over.”

“Negative! They've put tire spikes down. We just pulled back in time to keep from blowing our tires, too. Over.”

“Can you get close enough to use shotguns? Over.”

“Negative! Oh Christ! The Lizzars have cars now! I see two cars coming at us. They're armored! We have to get out of their way! Over.”

“This doesn't sound good at all. Leave it to Paul to think of tire spikes since he was a cop,” John said.

“The Lizzars must want our cars intact or reasonably so. You better tell the other cars to leave them for now. We can't afford to lose them, too,” Jim said.

“I'm going to call the Colonel. He might be able to see our ramming car. John Weaver to Colonel Smith. Over,” John said.

“Smith here. I've been monitoring your calls. We're up thirty feet and can't get down to help your car. Who's Paul? Over.”

John asked, “Paul is one of us who was captured. We believe he's being forced to show the enemy how to do things. Colonel, do you have any artillery to fire on the Lizzars swarming our car or on the Lizzar cars that the enemy now has? Over.”

Smith answered, “I have some mortars. Are you sure you want to risk your people's lives? Over.”

John replied, “Their car is armored. Just don't hit it directly. I'll appreciate anything you can do for them. Over.”

“Sergeant Grim, are you monitoring this? Over,” Smith said.

“Affirmative, sir.”

“Move your APC out and put some fire around the disabled car to protect it. Also, try to knock out the other two cars. Over.”

Ray answered, “Yes sir! Out.”

“Generator car, circle the area. See if you can spot a good place for us to get to the top. Do not let yourself get disabled. Over,” John said.

“Affirmative, APC. Out.”

• • •

Harry said, “If I'm right, they're not very experienced at driving. Maintain a constant speed, Gina. I'll keep watch on them for you. When I say hit the brakes, jam them to the floor. Maybe we can cause the Lizzars to kill some of their people for us.”

Gina said, "Okay, I hope you know what you're doing. Sure you don't want to drive?"

"Just circle not too far out from the back of the Lizzars and don't hit any tire spikes. That and listen to me. I won't let us get into trouble."

"Maybe, but how are you going to check the slopes for a way up?" she asked.

"I'll do that when the Lizzars aren't threatening us. First we have to reduce the odds," he answered.

• • •

Colonel Smith fired with his pistol at the Lizzars who tried to enter the main building. He emptied his automatic pistol and more Lizzars were still coming. He switched the empty pistol to his left hand and backed up as one Lizzar menaced him with a sword until he was beside the display case. Before the Lizzar knew what was happening, Smith turned and smashed the glass with his pistol's barrel. The shattered glass fell to the floor while he quickly reached for one of the display swords. Smith slashed out as he drew the sword from the display case, nearly hitting the Lizzar on the neck.

"You like swords? Well, then, let's play!" he said to the uncomprehending Lizzar as he took his stance before advancing across the broken glass that kept the Lizzar from reaching him. Smith thrust three times at the Lizzar before he succeeded in severing an artery in the Lizzar's neck. As the blood spurted out, the Lizzar tried to use one hand to stem the flow. Smith slashed out and severed the Lizzar's hand before it reached the wound. The Lizzar stared in astonishment at his wrist giving Smith more than enough time to slash out once more and cut deeply into the muscle on the Lizzar's other arm. The Lizzar's sword fell to the floor while the colonel continued with another thrust into the Lizzar's neck to cause more damage. The Lizzar fell backwards while another moved forward over his body to challenge the colonel.

"Guttentag!" the colonel roared as he parried the Lizzar's thrust and kicked up at the armor chest plate. The Lizzar stumbled backwards into other Lizzars trying to move forward through the doorway. Smith glanced over to the side, then said, "Miss Wade, reload my pistol!" before tossing it to her.

• • •

Ray fired for effect after he found the range to the disabled car. He

could see that the Lizzars were trying to get in without success. He hoped that he'd be in time to save the occupants from death. He hadn't even given any thought to the women he left behind at the armory. Nor did he realize that they didn't have anyone to lead them as Sergeant Pullen was directing the other APC around the compound to distribute more ammunition to those in need. While Ray fired, the two women he assigned to man the APC's machine gun were busy preventing the APC from being swarmed over by countless Lizzars. Even as he loaded and fired the mortar, he held his automatic in one hand so he could fire upon any Lizzars who climbed up the side of the APC where the machine gun couldn't be brought to bear on them because Ray was in the way. He felt an arrow enter his shoulder and left it in so he wouldn't bleed worse from his wound.

The machine gun stopped firing as one woman pitched forward with an arrow in her back. The loader pulled her down inside and then stood up behind the gun and resumed firing. Sergeant Grim was about to order the driver to pull back when two more APC's pulled up along side. Their machine gunners evened the odds around them. Ray went back to loading and firing mortar rounds near the disabled car while three machine guns swept the area around the APC's clear of any threat to him.

• • •

"Hit the brakes now!" Harry yelled.

Gina slammed on the brakes while Harry braced himself. One of the Lizzar cars flashed by in front of them to slam into the rear units of the Lizzars.

"Hit the gas now!" he yelled.

• • •

Miss Wade ran over behind the colonel. "It's loaded!"

Smith put his left hand behind him with his palm open. "Hand it to me. I can't take my eyes off this lizard. He's better than the rest or smart enough to know that I'm better and not press his luck."

She reached out and almost let go of the pistol before he had it. She had to move quickly to keep up with him as he advanced on his foe to force a retreat back to the doorway. Feeling his pistol in his hand, Smith brought his pistol around and retreated as he chambered a round into the barrel. The Lizzar facing him suddenly realized that he was as good as dead and charged. Smith fired at the Lizzar's head and stepped aside in time to avoid

being stabbed. He fired two more shots at the Lizzars pressing from behind the one he killed before slashing out with his sword to decapitate another one of them.

• • •

"I don't know who's in charge. All I know is that we can't lose the armory or we're all done for. Take positions and don't fire until you're sure of your target. Some of our guys might get here soon for more ammo. You two get behind that counter. You and you get into the back and watch the windows. You get over to the ammo storage area and stay there. If anyone gets past us, it's up to you. You two keep the ammo ready to hand out," Martine said as she pointed out positions and tasks to other members of the platoon.

"They're on the roof!" one woman said as she aimed her rifle at the ceiling

Martine shouted, "Don't shoot through the roof! They can't do anything to us from up there."

• • •

Harry shouted, "There's our other car. Radio the military that the new car is ours!"

Gina transmitted, "Generator car to Sergeant Grim. The new car is ours. Over."

• • •

Sergeant Grim noticed the new car come into the area. He was about to fire on it when the APC driver shouted, "The new car is on our side!"

He answered, "Okay, I won't shoot on them. I hope we can expect more help than this."

The driver shouted back, "So do I. I expected a lot more than three cars."

• • •

"John Weaver to Colonel Smith. Expected time of arrival is twenty minutes. Advise your people that the centaurs are our allies. I repeat, the centaurs are on our side. Over."

"John, this is Colonel Smith's secretary, Miss Wade. He's busy now. Did you say centaurs? Like the mythological half-man and half-horse kind?"

Over.”

“Affirmative. I said centaurs are on our side. Do not shoot them. It pisses them off. Over.”

Miss Wade replied, “I'll pass that on to everyone. How many of you are there? Over.”

John answered, “Two cohorts of centaurs and one APC. Over.”

“She probably doesn't know how big a cohort is,” Jim said.

John transmitted, “Two hundred centaurs and one APC. Over.”

“Thank you for explaining. I'll pass the word around. Are there any other allies we should know about? Over.”

John answered, “Just centaurs and humans. We don't know of anyone else other than the Lizzars on this world and they're the enemy. Over.”

“I understand, John. Thank you. Over.”

• • •

Miss Wade shouted to be heard over the sounds of fighting, “Our friends are only twenty minutes away now. They advised me to warn you all that the centaurs are on our side. Everyone hear that?”

Colonel Smith said, “Well, talk about the cavalry coming to the rescue,” as he ducked under a Lizzar's thrust and slashed the Lizzar's thigh. “All right, who's next for Parry and Thrust 101?” he hollered at the Lizzars. “Remember, it's either pass or fail. I do not grade on a curve.”

• • •

Harry hollered, “Try to take out the Lizzar cars while we find the best way up the slope for our people when they arrive.”

“How?”

“Be creative! Make them run into each other or something! Just watch out for the tire spikes!” Harry shouted back.

• • •

“Those Lizzar cars could be trouble for our centaurs. They don't have any idea about how to deal with them. Not that I know of,” Jim said.

John said, “You're right. We might have to wreck the APC taking them out if it becomes necessary. Worst comes to worst, we'll ride back on centaurs. You have any ideas on how to deal with the Lizzar cars?”

“Unless they have access to lots of fuel, we could run them out of gas.”

“You just stated why we have to take and hold Conway again. Until

those fuel tanks are empty, we need that town," John said.

"Yeah, I guess I just did. What about building a still to fuel our cars? Then we can blow up the tanks and forget Conway."

John replied, "No good. We need the diesel fuel for the truck and APC. If we have to hold it for that, we might as well hold it for the other as well. We'll worry about making a still later."

"Um, yeah, we do need the diesel fuel. Bad idea then about blowing up the gas station."

"Not a bad idea. Just a bad time. Later on, we'll have to destroy those tanks so they can't be used by the Lizzars to make things with. That or dig them up and drag them away," John said.

"Now, that might be something we could use the truck for. We could dig sideways and back the truck in until we're under the tanks. Then all we have to do is finish digging them free and drive off with them," Jim said.

"That's worth considering. Remember to bring that up when we get back to camp."

• • •

Colonel Smith felt the breeze from the arrow that whizzed past his left ear. He looked at the doorway and fired two rounds from his pistol while parrying a thrust from another Lizzar. Before the Lizzar could recover, Smith kicked up between the Lizzar's legs. The Lizzar dropped his sword and fell to his knees with his hands clasping his crotch.

Smith said, "So, you've got 'em there, too?" as he slashed sideways with his sword to decapitate the helpless Lizzar whose body pitched forward adding more blood to the soaked carpet. Every step that Colonel Smith took was accompanied by a squishing sound from the blood that his victims lost.

He advanced over his victim's body to thrust quickly into another Lizzar's neck, severing the jugular vein before the Lizzar could react. His pistol fired point blank at the Lizzar beside his newest victim and staggered backward into more Lizzar warriors. The pistol clicked and Smith tossed it over to his secretary.

"Reload!" he hollered.

"You don't have anymore ammunition!" she hollered back.

"Then grab a sword to defend yourself in case one of them gets by me!"

A burst of machine gun fire echoed from outside the building. The Lizzars turned in surprise as some of them fell forward into the backs of

others trying to get inside the building.

Colonel Smith glanced at the APC that moved toward the front door as the last Lizzar ran into his sword. "I guess you won't need a sword after all, Miss Wade."

• • •

"I just hope we can hold out for the time it's going to take the other four cohorts to reach us," John said.

"That is going to be a problem. It's going to take them most of the day. Still, we're two hundred more than the Lizzars counted on fighting," Jim said.

"And deep into Lizzar territory. They could be sending for reinforcements, too. It took them a few days to get Conway, but they succeeded."

"True, but you didn't have the resources we have now," Jim said.

"I'm hoping that fighting offensively this time will make the difference. I'd rather this was a repeat of the Battle of the Bulge and not the Alamo," John said.

Jim asked, "You studied a lot of battles?"

"I felt those were closely related enough to be worth studying. I developed a few football plays from studying battles. More often, I picked up on the sense of strategy that the generals used. They looked for things to do that the enemy didn't expect. I think that's why some battles were so pivotal. For instance, the Germans expected everyone to roll over and surrender when they went on the offensive. They didn't expect someone to hunker up and say nuts. Worse yet, it was in a strategic location they had to control. Hand me the rifle scope. We should be getting close enough to see something."

Jim handed John the scope. John steadied it against his right eye with part of his hand cushioning it. John scanned the horizon, then said, "Yes, I can just make out the tops of the buildings now. Time to contact the colonel."

Jim handed John the handset.

"John Weaver to Colonel Smith. We're in sight of your buildings now. We should be there within a few more minutes. How are you holding out? Over."

"Miss Wade here. Oh, here comes the colonel. One moment please."

"Smith here. I just cleared my office of those nasty pests. I could hear

you state that you're in sight of our buildings. So far, we're still holding all the buildings. I don't know how your disabled car is doing, but you've still got two out there facing off against the two enemy cars. I'd tell you what my casualties are so far, but I don't know yet. Over."

John asked, "Okay, just tell me how many people you started off with."

"Is the radio secure, John?" Smith asked.

John answered, "So far as we know, we have the only radios. We're still trying to fix some portable radios the prison had, but we're really lacking the right parts to fix those. Otherwise, I think we're secure. Over."

Smith answered, "I had 160 cadets and sixteen adults when we started. Over."

"You're fighting with kids?" asked John.

"They're not exactly kids anymore. This is a college level academy. Right now, they're men and women. Over." Smith then said, "Miss Wade, try to contact everyone when I finish to find out what our casualties are."

"I understand. I've been fighting the Lizzars with high school and college students and prison guards. Over," John said.

Smith asked, "How well are you armed? Over."

John replied, "We're down to very few bullets and shotgun shells. Most of us use bows and arrows now. Over."

"Miss Wade, contact the supply room. Tell them we'll want all the archery equipment issued out. Maybe we can conserve some of our ammunition and return a few arrows back to the enemy. John, we've got archery equipment. I'll have it issued out to conserve on ammunition for firearms. Over," Colonel Smith said.

"This is Private Burr. Sorry to interrupt. Sergeant Grim just wiped out one of the enemy cars. Thought you'd like to know. Over."

"Tell the Sergeant he did good. You're all doing good. Over," Smith said.

"Generator car to APC. Over."

"APC here. Report. Over."

"There is no suitable location for getting a vehicle up or down the slopes. There are a few spots where a man can climb. Over."

John replied, "Understood. Colonel, we'll have to fight them on the plains while you hold the island, I mean, the fort. Over."

Smith answered, "Affirmative. Any relief you can give us will be appreciated. Over."

• • •

Private Burr asked, "Is there anyway for a mortar to cause a landslide, Sergeant?"

"If you hit the area just right, sure. Why?" Ray asked as he loosed another round at the remaining enemy car before glancing over at the disabled car to see if it was being threatened again.

"I overheard the reinforcements talking about having no way up here for their vehicles. They'll have to fight down there."

"How many reinforcements are there?" Ray asked.

"I heard them say two hundred earlier," she said.

"Two hundred and they're attacking all that? God, they're either brave or crazy!" he said as he dropped another round into the tube.

"Then they'll be wiped out?" she asked.

He answered, "That's my best guess unless we do something for them. Tell them we're going to pick on one spot and try to create a landslide. Even if they can't get up, we'll be able to ride down and fight with them."

• • •

Martine ordered, "Fire!" as she saw two Lizzars appear at the doorway to the armory. Enough bullets flew through the doorway to kill both Lizzars several times over.

She yelled, "Cease fire! Don't use so many shots next time!"

• • •

"Generator car to mortar. You were too far away from the slope to do anything. Over."

Burr yelled, "Too far out!"

Ray adjusted the range, glanced over at the disabled car, then dropped another mortar round into the tube. "Pass more rounds up!"

"Generator car to mortar. You're right at the base of the slope. Over."

Burr struggled with the box of mortar rounds. "They just said you hit at the base of the slope. This is the last box we have with us!"

Ray said, "Tell one of the other APC's to go back for more mortar rounds. How's our machine gun ammunition?"

She looked inside the APC, then said, "Shitty, Sergeant."

"Tell them to bring us more of that, too," he said.

• • •

Miss Wade said, "We have twenty-three confirmed dead. Sergeant De Long is one of them, sir."

"Who's running his platoon?" Smith asked.

"They're running it themselves, sir," she answered.

"Then they are men. Advise them that if they need anything to contact us. Otherwise, tell them they're doing a hell of a job and that I'm proud of everyone of them."

• • •

Sergeant Pullen's APC pulled up to the armory and supply building. The APC backed up close enough for the rear hatch to be opened without exposing anyone to arrows from the Lizzars. The machine gunner swept the roof with a couple of bursts while the rear hatch was opened. Sergeant Pullen was soon carried out with several arrows in his back.

"Get a cot for him! Put him over there so he won't be hit again!" Martine ordered.

"We need someone to man the mortar!" Wallensky said.

Martine said, "None of us have had that class yet. Oh, god! Deena! Is she?"

"Yeah, she didn't even feel it, I think. We need more ammo for the machine gun and an assistant," Wallensky said.

Martine looked around and said, "Wallace, Reed, Moss! Get ammo for the APC and go with Wallensky. Come on, Wall, let's get Deena out of there."

• • •

"There's a hell of a lot of them. As many as I remember taking Conway," John said.

"Then this is our chance for revenge. They're not getting Judgment Academy. It's got too many weapons," Jim said.

John turned toward Freya and shouted, "Okay, use your best judgment on how to attack. Good luck to you all!"

"To you as well, John!" she shouted before yelling, "Charge!"

• • •

Sergeant Grim paused for a moment as he caught sight of the centaurs everyone was talking about in between shooting and loading. Those brief bits of conversation wasn't enough for them to really make complete sense

to him. His sense of awe was captured as he saw the natural cavalry advance in a charge with bows firing arrows at the backs of the Lizzars. Then the Lizzars retaliated with their own bows, taking some of the pressure off the academy.

Ray shifted his aim and fired off a round to sight in on the Lizzars. Satisfied with his results, he fired for effect to reduce the odds against the vastly outnumbered centaurs.

• • •

Harry said, "He's heading back for the cohorts! Cut him off! We can't let him get to them!"

"Wreck him?" asked Gina.

"Hell yes! Better us than all of them!" he answered.

• • •

Colonel Smith noticed that the Lizzars weren't climbing over the edge as quickly as before. "Now's our chance to shove them off! Miss Wade, head for the armory with that radio! I'm going out to rally the troops!"

"Out there? No way, sir!" she exclaimed.

"Then you better pick up one of those swords, after all. See you later." He walked over the dead Lizzars, stopping to pick up a bow and quiver of arrows since his pistol was empty. Holding the sword in his right hand, he awkwardly took an arrow from the quiver and nocked it to the bow. Spotting a Lizzar, he aimed and fired.

"Not as good as ours," he muttered as the arrow glanced off the Lizzar's chest plate.

The Lizzar ran at him. Smith dropped the bow to his side and met the Lizzar with his sword. He found the Lizzar no better at swordplay than most of the others he'd already dispatched. He needed only a few moves with his sword to kill the Lizzar and move on in search of more of the enemy. Without realizing it, he was headed past the armory.

• • •

Private Wallensky directed her APC to pull alongside Sergeant Grim's. She hollered over, "Tell me how to use this! Sergeant Pullen is badly wounded."

Ray glanced over at the woman who was sitting on the top of the APC beside the mortar in a similar manner to himself. Two other women manned

the machine gun in front of her. He hollered, "Set the range with this dial here! Turn it to two..."

• • •

Private Martine couldn't believe her eyes that the colonel was fighting across the compound by himself. She spotted a group of Lizzars heading toward him. She hollered, "You three, follow me!" and ran out of the supply room doorway.

Without looking back to see if she was being obeyed, she yelled, "Charge!" as she aimed and fired her assault rifle at the oncoming Lizzars while she ran to join the colonel.

The colonel quickly glanced around himself, spotted the danger, and then saw his cadets' reactions. He resumed fighting the Lizzars in front of him while the new threat was nullified by his cadets.

"Sir, you need something more than that sword!" Martine said.

"Never underestimate any weapon, Cadet!" he replied as he parried a thrust before slashing out at his opponent.

"Sir, you're exposed out here! There's still too many of them!" she said while shooting at two more Lizzars who ran toward her and the others.

• • •

Ray hollered, "Good, Wallensky! Turn the dial one click counter-clockwise, then drop another round in!"

"Yes sir, Sergeant!" she yelled.

"I'm going to give you the task of creating a landslide. It's important! Otherwise, our allies won't be able to join us up here!"

"Yes, Sergeant, sir!"

He hollered, "Drop the sir stuff! You're as much a soldier now as I am!"

• • •

The colonel winced at the arrow in his arm. Martine ordered, "Take him to the armory while we cover you!"

One woman put his arm around her shoulder. She then hurried with him to the armory. Martine and the other two women fired their rifles at the Lizzars while slowly backing up.

• • •

Jim stopped the APC beside the disabled ramming car. John shouted,

"Anyone alive in there? Dennis! Gail! Are you still in there?"

• • •

Martine shouted, "Get a cot for the colonel. Find a bandage for his wound! Everyone else hold your positions!"

• • •

John climbed down from the APC onto the car, then into the open roof. He looked at the two youngsters who died holding hands. He quickly climbed back onto the APC and entered back through the upper hatch. "They're both dead."

"Sorry you lost them since you knew them better than I," Jim said.

"They were the first couple I married, I think."

"You want me to run over some Lizzars now?" Jim asked.

"Yeah...wait!" John said while he sniffed the air. He looked around, then wet one finger and held it up.

"Go left and then straight. I want to check out something," John said.

"Did you see something?" asked Jim.

"No, I smelled something. It smelled like burning tobacco."

"We don't have any left. You think it's someone on the other side?" Jim asked.

John answered, "That's what I want to find out. There were enough cigarettes in the grocery to last four months or more for everyone who smoked. Someone's smoking over there and it isn't any of us since the Lizzar's cleaned out the grocery store."

• • •

Colonel Smith staggered over to Private Martine. "I forgot that just about everyone was inside a building or vehicle. Stupid of me to run outside intending to rally troops who aren't there any longer. Thanks for coming to my rescue."

"Well, we need you, too. My sergeant is out there and we don't have anyone in command. What should we do now, sir?" Martine replied.

"You're already doing it. About the only thing I can suggest is to let the Lizzars get a bit closer before you fire. We need to conserve ammo. This isn't going to be a short siege from the looks of it. These reptilian buggers are a determined lot."

• • •

"Sergeant Grim, I think it just collapsed!" Wallensky exclaimed.

Ray glanced over to where he had Wallensky firing at. He could see that the edge had fallen away some. "Put a couple more rounds over there. See if anymore falls."

• • •

John said, "Run them over, Jim! Either Paul will get the hell out of the way or he'll get run over!"

"Hang on, then!" Jim hollered as he steered for the small force of Lizzars standing around Paul.

John said, "What gets me is that the Lizzars are the ones smoking, not Paul!"

"Really?" Jim asked as John dropped down and closed the upper hatch.

• • •

Gina said, "Hang on! He can't get away this time!"

Harry gripped the back of the front seats and braced for the impact. The collision came a moment later. He felt himself tossed about inside the car Gina smashed her car into the left front wheel of the Lizzar car. She backed off with the engine smoking.

"Gotcha!" she exclaimed.

Harry said, "Get us the hell out of here! We've got Lizzars coming!"

• • •

Ray noticed that the Lizzar car could barely move. He waited calmly for the damaged friendly car to move far enough away before he lobbed three shells at the Lizzar car. When the third shell hit it dead center, he said, "Tell the colonel that the Lizzars are out of the car business and that we'll work on their troops now."

• • •

"They've left Paul standing alone. Do you want to rescue or run over him?" Jim asked.

"Circle around him. I want to see why he's standing still," John replied.

Chapter 12

Frea spotted the fallen away section on the slope before she led her cohort into the swarming mass of Lizzars. Arrows flew in every direction as her warriors shot to the front and both sides. More arrows fired by the Lizzars did more harm to themselves than to her cohort. The other cohort followed close behind, keeping the swarming Lizzars from closing in around Frea's Fifth Cohort.

As they moved forward, mortar shells fell to both sides, far enough away to reduce the number of Lizzars without harming the cohorts. The number of Lizzars attacking with swords and spears quickly dropped off as other Lizzars hesitated to cross through the areas controlled by the mortars. Though the mortars didn't stop the Lizzars from firing arrows, the explosions and smoke reduced the number of hits they could make.

• • •

Colonel Smith said, "Get another mortar set up here. We can add some firepower to the battle. Got a radio, Private?"

Martine said, "We'll find one, sir."

• • •

Paul raised his right hand and extended his middle finger. Without asking John anything, Jim steered straight for Paul and ran him over. Paul's body crunched beneath the treads.

John closed his eyes and tried not to imagine what Paul looked like. "Take us back to the battle. We've done enough here."

• • •

"I found the radios!"

Martine ordered, "Bring one to the colonel! I'm busy getting the mortar set up!"

• • •

"One of our cars is damaged. We better pick up passengers, John, even though it's going to become crowded back there," Jim said.

"Okay, steer for them. Christ! It's the generator car!"

Jim asked, "Do you want me to crush the generator after we pick them

up?"

John empathetically said, "No! We have to keep the radio and the generator. We need the generator to refuel. What about a tow?"

Jim asked, "You going to step outside to hook it up?"

"Not without covering fire. I guess that means the only thing we can do is stick with them for now."

"Or send them home," Jim suggested.

"Yes, you're right. That's exactly what we have to do. We'll send the other car back with them as an escort."

"What about us? Who's going to watch our backside?" asked Jim.

"We'll just have to get on the hill before nightfall. Otherwise, we'll have to leave on our own. I just hope this fuel guzzler has enough left for us to put plenty of distance between ourselves and the Lizzars," John said.

• • •

"You're doing fine now. Just listen to your spotter's instructions and adjust your aim as I taught you," Colonel Smith said.

Martine answered, "Yes sir. How's your arm?"

"It smarts while the rest of me is stupid. Ladies, keep the mortar rounds coming. They won't do us any good if we're overrun, so let's use them to keep that from happening. We'll worry about the future after we live through this," Smith said.

• • •

"Up the slope! Hurry now! It will be dark soon!" Frea shouted.

She watched from a quarter of the way up the slope as her warriors broke free of the last few Lizzars and charged up the thirty-foot high slope. More than a few of them were wounded. Many had two and three wounds. That was evident from the arrows still sticking out of their hides. Frea glanced down at her right front leg. She didn't much like the looks of her own wound. She hoped the humans on the hill had some of the same medicines that the people of Conway gave her warriors once before to cleanse and bandage their wounds. As the last of her cohort went up the slope, she resumed climbing up it herself while the other cohort was just reaching the slope.

She was astonished moments later to see that the hill was still infested with Lizzar soldiers whom her warriors were engaging in combat. She could tell that the Lizzars were disturbed at being hit from two sides as

her force was behind many of them and the humans were on the other side. One way or the other, the Lizzars' backs were exposed to attack.

She spotted a Lizzar fleeing the battle and swung with her iron sword as he passed by her. Her sword caught him in the back, severing his spine. He fell to the ground. His muscles and some organs experienced spasms that caused him to twitch and defecate involuntarily. Frea was already looking for another enemy to fight as she was sure that he was out of the battle, even if it took him several hours to die. She knew she couldn't waste time dispatching him completely when there were other able-bodied Lizzars who still posed a real threat. Forming a near solid wall of death, she and other centaur warriors advanced on the Lizzars, forcing more of them to flee their unbearable and vulnerable position.

She caught a glimpse of several Lizzars leaping from the edge of the stolen piece of Earth to escape from her warriors who gave them little choice. Her force spread out more and more while the following cohort added more strength to the attack.

She shouted, "Clear the area of all Lizzars! Kill them or force them to jump! Remember to say hello in English to the humans when you see them! These are newcomers who don't know our language!"

• • •

"John, I think we better try to make it up the slope now."

"Go for it, Jim. We better find out now while we still have light if we can make it up there," John responded.

Jim said, "Everyone back there, hang on!"

• • •

Freya stopped beside one of four APC's. "I'm Sub-commander Freya, Fifth Cohort. Can you direct me to your leader?"

Sergeant Grim stared at the centaur leader in astonishment. He hadn't expected them to have females in command, especially not naked females. He stammered, "I'm Sergeant Grim, Sub-commander. You can find Colonel Smith at the armory and supply room where we have another mortar like this one set up. It's a one-story building beside the Mess Hall. He's our commander. If you like, I can escort you to him."

She answered, "I would appreciate an escort. By the way, you wouldn't happen to have any bandages, would you? I seem to have picked up an arrow by the wrong end."

"One bandage coming up. If you like, I'll apply it to your wound for you," Ray replied.

"Yes, you may. Thank you."

Ray dropped inside the APC. He emerged from the rear hatch moments later with a field dressing. He walked over to Frea and said, "This is going to hurt when I yank it out."

"Just do it, please."

Ray grasped the arrow and pulled quickly. Blood spurted out on him while he opened the dressing. He quickly applied the dressing to the wound and wrapped the tie strings around in place, creating a snug fit that reduced the bleeding considerably. "We have some ambulance technicians with us. I don't know how much medical knowledge they have, but it's probably a lot more than mine."

"Thank you, Sergeant Grim. Shall we go see Colonel Smith now?"

"Yes, we should. Wallensky! Keep watch and show someone else how to use the mortar on my APC! I'll be back soon!"

Wallensky shouted, "Right, Sergeant!"

Ray walked beside Frea. He avoided looking at her if only because he was unsure of whether she would mind being stared at.

"Are you all professional soldiers?" she asked.

Ray answered, "Some of us were. This is an academy to teach military warfare and subjects of higher education. Most of the people here are cadets who have never fought before in their lives."

"Your cadets appear to have acquitted themselves well for so few. Yes, I know how many. Coach Weaver passed information on to me before we reached the battle. He taught us that good military intelligence can win battles," Frea said.

"Coach?" asked Ray.

"Yes, he was a football coach. He didn't tell us wrong, did he?"

Ray answered, "Not at all. He's very correct on military intelligence being a key to winning. It's just that I didn't expect a football coach to be in charge."

"Oh! He's in charge of the human force. Over Commander Zira is in charge of all our forces. I'm only in charge of the Fifth Cohort. My unit and the Sixth Cohort were escorting John and his group. We were to provide perimeter defense while his group checked out the prison and dormitory sites."

"How many, uh, centaurs are in a cohort?"

"One hundred," Frea answered.

"Then that charge of yours was one of the bravest acts I've ever seen. There must be at least ten thousand enemy soldiers out there," Ray said.

"More like twenty thousand, but we have always fought against great odds. Since John came along, we've learned much and made up for the disparity...I hope that's the right word...in other ways."

The sergeant said, "You said the right word. You speak English quite well."

"I had several high school teachers and college students to teach me. Thank you for the compliment, sergeant. We used to all have bronze weapons as well. John gave us better weapons, though he didn't have many. Now we can kill enough Lizzars to take weapons from their dead to give to those of us in need of better weapons. That alone changed the odds against us."

Ray said, "That's Colonel Smith there. Colonel Smith! May I present Sub-commander Frea?"

"Sub-commander Frea, Fifth Cohort. I am pleased to meet...Is that a machete?"

Colonel Smith followed Frea's gaze after tearing his eyeballs away from her breasts. He held his sword out as he realized she was staring at it. "No, this is a sword. Tempered tungsten-steel blade and guaranteed to slice off Lizzar heads. I should know. I lopped off a few with it today."

"It is beautiful and so long and sharp!" she said.

"Then it's yours," Smith said.

"I can't leave you without a weapon!" she exclaimed.

"I have more of these in my office. This just happens to be the one that was closest to me at the time when I needed a weapon. Take it, please," Smith said.

Frea accepted the sword handed to her by the hilt. She felt of the edge. In her mind, she knew instantly that it was a weapon that would taste much Lizzar blood while she lived. She stammered, "I...I...thank you. You are as...kind as the other humans I know. I shall honor your blade with the blood of our enemies."

Ray said, "Sir, her people are in desperate need of weapons. Perhaps..."

"A good idea, Sergeant!" Colonel Smith said. "After all, very few of us use swords anymore."

"But when you run out of bullets, you'll have to have something!" Frea exclaimed.

"We're far from defeated, even if we run out of bullets. That's one of the maxims we teach here. The most dangerous weapon you have is your

brain. So long as you have that, you can hurt the enemy. However, you didn't come here to hear me lecture. Sergeant, take most of the swords from my office and hand them over. Leave me a good saber and find out if any of the rest of the staff wants one. If not, then give away more to our allies since they know how to use them," Colonel Smith said.

"Yes, sir. What about the museum room display? Should be some battle-axes and such in there," Ray answered.

"Yes, those too," the colonel answered.

Frea turned and looked around. She spotted one of her squad leaders and hailed him. "Squad leader Moru! Go with Sergeant Grim. He has steel swords to give you!"

"Oh, give them the sheaths if you can find them, sergeant," Smith said.

Frea asked, "Sheaths?"

He answered, "Yes, to hold your sword when you're not using it. That way you can keep both hands free. Would you like to look around, Sub-commander Frea?"

"Certainly. Please call me Frea. We are friends."

"As you wish, Frea. You may call me Mark."

"Mark. An interesting sounding name. So pointed and brief. It fits you."

"Thanks. Now, what would you like to see first?"

She answered, "Whatever you wish. However, we haven't much time before it becomes dark. Our nights here are different than on your Earth. For about two hours of your time, it will be pitch black. Then our three moons will rise and it will be light enough to see again."

"Private Martine! Have someone look inside for the night vision goggles. See that they're issued to everyone. Give some of the spares to our new allies and show them how to use those. Also, get the archery equipment out to the best archers we have. I don't want to give away our position in the dark with gunfire."

"That's already been done, sir! Miss Wade contacted us earlier."

"Any bows left over?" he asked.

"A few, sir."

"Then see to it that some of the centaurs receive them. Frea, have any of your, uh, centaurs a good eye for archery?"

Frea answered, "Yes, but what are these night vision goggles?"

Mark explained, "They allow us to see in the dark, even when our moon around Earth isn't visible to reflect light. Just give the goggles and bows to some of your best archers and we'll stop the Lizzars dead in their tracks."

Martine said, "Sir, Mr. Weaver is calling. They can't make it up the

slope!”

The colonel said, “Notify three of the APC's to get over to them with a tow line. We're not leaving anyone down there tonight. Also, contact Miss Wade and find out what our casualty status is.”

“Sir?” Martine asked.

Smith turned and asked, “What?”

Martine answered, “Sir, Mr. Weaver called to warn you that none of his people are wearing anything. The Lizzars took their clothes to make bowstrings.”

“Then tell him that we'll give him and his people clothes,” Smith said.

Martine said, “Mr. Weaver, Colonel Smith says we'll give you clothes. Over.”

“We don't want any. Just wanted to let you know what to expect is all. Over.”

Martine said, “Colonel Smith, Mr. Weaver says they don't want any clothes. He just wanted to let us know what to expect.”

Mark said, “Ask him how many men are in his APC.”

Martine asked, “Mr. Weaver, how many men are in your APC? Over.”

John replied, “Four men and six women. Over.”

“I heard that. No need to repeat it, Martine. I guess if they're not embarrassed to be naked, we can put up with it. Anyway, it can't be any worse with them naked than it is with all these centaurs around here now. Tell him thanks for not surprising us. Uh, pass the word around that we have guests who will be naked. I expect everyone to remain reserved and civilized,” Smith said.

• • •

John held on tightly as the APC struggled up the steep slope with assistance from two other APC's using tow cables. For a few moments, he seriously contemplated telling everyone to just forget it and climb up by hand, leaving the APC closed up while hoping that the Lizzars couldn't get into it.

“We need to recover those cars the Lizzars used. They still have useable tires. With those, we can put our ramming car back into action. I don't know what we'll do next time about tire spikes, though,” Jim said.

“Nor do I. The Lizzars have countered our biggest advantage with the simplest counter-measure possible. We'll have to rethink our usage of the cars from here on out.”

"Even using them elsewhere is going to be dangerous. If the Lizzars learned enough from Paul or from the others they still hold, they'll cause the cars to be nearly useless."

"What I'm concerned about is whether or not there's anyway for the Lizzars to counter our APC's. I'm including the academy's simply because they're on our side," John said.

"I'll give it some thought," Jim said.

• • •

Colonel Smith waited with his new saber sheathed on his hip and his pistol holstered on his other hip. Beside him, Frea practiced drawing her sword from the sheath she now wore. John's APC drew near and stopped. John dropped inside the upper hatch and emerged moments later from the rear hatch along with the rest of his group.

Colonel Smith said, "You weren't kidding about being naked. Sure you don't want any clothes?"

"We'd only rip them apart to make bowstrings to give to other centaurs who desperately need bows. Truthfully, you and I need to talk privately for a few minutes," John said.

"About what? An agreement to be allies?" asked Colonel Smith.

John answered, "I think it's a foregone conclusion that we're allies since we're both fighting the same enemy. No, what I want to talk about is weapons."

Colonel Smith said, "We're already giving the centaur warriors what weapons we can spare. Surely, you don't want us to give them more than we can reasonably do without?"

"They won't leave you defenseless. It's not in their nature to treat their allies that way. Please, may we talk privately?"

"Very well. Shall we talk in my office? I think it's just about clear of bodies now."

• • •

"I'm sorry about the glass not being cleaned up yet. Watch your step, Mr. Weaver."

"You don't have to address me so formally. It's still John."

"Is this a friendly discussion then, John?"

John replied, "I'm trying to make it so. I just didn't want to create problems for you until you've had a chance to hear this first. Then you can

reach a decision and we'll go on from there."

"In that case, call me Mark. Now what's so important, John?"

John answered, "It's about the nudity. What I said about us ripping the clothes to make bowstrings is absolutely true. The natives on this world haven't been able to make bowstrings because the native plants are too dangerous to use. I'll give you a quick primer on what I know about this world..."

• • •

Mark said, "I see what you mean about their resources being somewhat limited. Well, since the Persians had crude electricity, I guess it's not all that strange for the Lizzars to have discovered it and progressed as they did. It's amazing that they even got as far as they did without the wheel."

"True, they're lucky to have stumbled into discovering what they have so far. Maybe saying that they hadn't invented the wheel is a bit too much to claim. After all, they do have round things, but they didn't use any of them for transportation purposes prior to our arrival. Anyway, the point is that sooner or later, you're going to run out of ammunition. If you want to be a good ally with the centaurs, you'll have to give up what you don't need. The centaurs simply don't understand modesty or the human need for it. We haven't done much to change that impression. I've personally screwed women in plain sight of other men and women. So, what I'm getting at is that the centaurs will want all your clothing to make bowstrings for shipment to other sectors. They see it as nothing less than a full commitment to survival and freedom on your part."

Mark sat down with a stunned look on his face. "Won't they be satisfied if we give them all the linen, blankets, and rope? And all but two uniform changes for each person?"

John answered, "They'll be very happy with that, but they won't be satisfied that we're doing absolutely everything in our power to remain free. Many of them risked their lives to liberate me and dozens of other people from slavery. A number of them died, just as some died today coming to your assistance. They didn't have to fight their way onto this island to be with you. They did because it's their way of showing how committed they are to being good allies. Admittedly, there are four more cohorts on the way, but they can't reach here until tomorrow morning at the soonest."

"You agree with them, then?" asked Mark.

"Put it this way, they're giving their lives. They're only asking us to give

up our clothing. Admittedly, they appreciate it when we fight alongside of them, but they've left it up to us as to who fights and who doesn't. That's because of their society. They recognize ours is different."

"Yes, you explained what you know about that fairly well. It's not all that unusual if you know anything about some of Earth's historic armies. I'm certainly not condemning their society because it's different."

"I believe they recognize that we're not as fast as themselves nor as strong as the Lizzars or themselves. Still, they haven't turned away any form of assistance we've offered. We're certainly not as numerous, so I guess they regard us as a special resource, because of our minds and knowledge, to be treasured and protected. They really don't care how we behave among ourselves, though they do view the goings on with curiosity."

"Which is why I'm concerned about how I'll maintain discipline among my cadets," Mark said.

"I don't know if you can hold them in your control."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Not in the least. I'm not going to counter anything you decide. What I'm trying to warn you about is what happened with us. Our mayor tried to run the show with an iron fist. The younger members rebelled and went their own direction. I'm no saint. I stayed with them because I liked getting pussy and they were free with theirs," John answered.

"Do you really think what happened to you will happen to us?" asked Mark.

"Either just before or when you run out of bullets and mortar shells. That's when everyone will begin to question your authority unless you can pull another rabbit out of the hat. That was the only way that I remained in control until I was captured. I managed to pull rabbits out of the hat. Had I failed earlier, they would have sought different leadership again. Admittedly, you have a bigger hat to pull rabbits from and I wish you nothing but good luck. In fact, I'll help you anyway I can."

"And you're not looking to take over from me?"

John answered, "I'll gladly become a civilian once more. You're far more qualified than I am to lead forces and win. I'll even state so publicly. In fact, I'm hoping you'll take the mantle of leadership off my shoulders. Your job isn't what I want. I want only to live free in safety."

"I'll consider the clothing situation and let you know later."

"Fine with me. There's no rush since we're not going anywhere for the time being."

"I'm not looking forward to the morning. If we're not under attack, I'll have little choice but to conduct a ceremony for our dead. I lost far more than I expected against an enemy armed only with swords, spears, and bows," Mark said.

"How many did you lose?" John asked.

"Forty men and two women. That's roughly a quarter of my people."

"You have my sympathies, Colonel, I mean, Mark. I lost two, a man and a woman who I joined in marriage. From what I saw, the cohorts lost close to forty of their warriors. We all took a pounding here today."

"Yes, but the enemy took far worse. I hesitate to guess how many they lost. Certainly several thousand."

"It doesn't matter how many they lost. The point is that we're deep inside Lizzar territory. They can get reinforcements here easier than we can. Plus they have much more than we have available. Tomorrow's battle will be against as many as were out there today. Even without the wheel, they've managed to deal with the problem of moving troops around effectively," John said.

"I think our next concern is to gather our top leaders and discuss tactics and strategy before the Lizzars attack again," Mark said.

Chapter 13

Mark ordered, "Okay, everyone! Get to digging! Fill in sandbags! We've not got very long before they attack in waves again. This time, they're not going to get so many of us as before with their arrows."

Frea gripped the shield that was taken from a suit of armor. She stood majestically with it on her left arm while her sword still hung from her hip in its sheath. Around her, piles of arrows were stacking up higher as her warriors recovered all they could find from dead Lizzars. Another pile was of bows, though many were broken. Still, the bowstrings were reusable, so those were still important. Yet another stack was of iron swords that other cohort warriors would be eager to have.

"We'll load most of those onto some APC's and try to get them out in the morning when we have more light to see by. You'll have to put one warrior in each APC to show the way to my people who'll drive the vehicles. I suggest that you send out some of your more seriously wounded as

guides. At any rate, that will give us an armored force outside our fort. We'll keep the rest of the APC's here to hold the fort with. I've got people loading up all the ammunition into each APC equally. We'll be mobile, at least. Your warriors are welcome to station themselves in the buildings as they see fit. The sandbags will give them cover to protect them from Lizzar arrows," Mark said.

Frea asked, "Did John talk with you about our need for bowstrings?"

"He did. I'm still considering my options about that."

Frea said, "We've learned that humans are friendly and will give the shirts off their backs to their friends."

"True enough about most humans. However, you're also asking for our pants and underwear. Most of us simply aren't ready to deal with being naked for the rest of our lives."

"What good will clothes do you if you're dead or enslaved? The Lizzars don't permit slaves to possess anything."

"I'm not arguing that. I'm simply stating that most of us spent our entire lives wearing clothes. It's a big step for us to take. I know enough about the past events to see that the others before us had little choice. Maybe we don't really have a choice, either. However, I have to figure out how I'm going to handle this, should I decide that you're right and that we have to live nude for the rest of our lives. However, I'd rather not discuss this now. I don't want to cause dissension among the ranks when we need all the unity we can muster at present."

"I understand. It's still puzzling to us how your people can be so much alike each other and have so many differences of opinion. You're very different from us," she said.

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"Miss Wade, in my APC, please," Colonel Smith said.

She entered the APC that held seven other soldiers and the colonel. Nearly every APC had as many, though not all.

"Miss Wade, I have a question for you to answer. I need an honest opinion and answer because this is important."

"I hope you're not going to ask me if I think I should marry you and will," she said.

"I'm flattered that you think that was on my mind, Miss Wade. However, the question is quite different. Had my Executive Officer been here instead of out in the field preparing for the war games we were

supposed to hold, I'd ask him as well. It's difficult for me to pose this question without sounding sexist. Nor am I trying to get into your panties as this might sound. What I want to know is, how far do you feel we should go in defending our lives?"

"As far as necessary, Colonel."

"No, hear me out. I haven't given you the whole question or circumstances."

"Sorry, Sir. Go on then."

"The centaurs have a desperate need for bowstrings to make bows with. According to John, the plant life on this world is highly unsuitable for bowstrings because it's too dangerous to handle. For now, I have to believe him. The centaurs need to make hundreds, if not thousands of bows so they can arm other centaur units around their world. They are essentially engaged in a primitive version of a world war. If they lose, they become slaves. So do we, since we're their allies. I've already learned that the Lizzars won't accept anyone as allies. Apparently, some people tried that already. They were still enslaved. Some were even killed. So, the centaurs are our only hope of remaining free. Now that's most of the situation."

"I think I understood most of that. Now what's the whole question?"

"Okay, back to the bowstrings. The centaurs learned that the Lizzars made theirs from clothing and material they took from the town of Conway, the prison, and the dormitory. To gain parity in the number of bows the Lizzars have, the centaurs need more bowstrings. To do that, they want our clothes in addition to all the rope, cord, linen, blankets, curtains, and whatever else is suitable that I've left out. If we agree, then we'd have to live naked for the rest of our lives. My question is, are we willing to go that far? Can we dare go that far or will we sink into behaviors that will tear us apart?"

"Is that why John and his people are naked?" she asked.

"For the most part, yes. The story about that is a bit more involved and lengthy. Suffice it to say that John and his people were willing to give up any clothing they had, though it wasn't very much."

"And it's really that serious concerning the outcome?" she asked.

Colonel Smith answered, "John was taken prisoner and enslaved. He worked in an ore mine all day and slept in a common room at night with armed guards walking among the prisoners every single minute to prevent escape. He and everyone else was shackled by their ankles, too. I sincerely believe him about the slavery part. He still has rings of raw skin around his ankles where the shackles restrained him. One man who tried to escape

was cut in half by a laser cannon and dragged back into the camp to rot in plain sight."

"I don't think you really need an answer then. You don't have much choice from what you've told me. If we don't meet the enemy with as much force as we can, then we'll lose, right?"

"That's how it might be."

"Then why ask me if you already know?"

"I'm asking for your opinion and to learn how far you're willing to go since you're a civilian. If you're willing to sacrifice that much, then the cadets will have little choice but to follow your lead. After all, they know you."

"Are you asking me to do this now?" she asked.

"No, I'm not. I still haven't decided yet whether we have to give up our clothes."

"But you don't have any real choice, do you?"

He answered, "I don't know yet. It's going to depend on how well we do during the next battle. When the Lizzars attack again, we're going to button up the APC's and run them over when possible for as long as possible while saving ammunition."

She asked, "How long will that be?"

"Possibly the whole day. It's going to be noisy and difficult on everyone. We'll have Lizzars clanging on the sides with their swords, spears, and arrows. There'll be more noise when we run over some of them."

"I guess I can stand the noise. What about fuel?"

"We've got fuel, though we'll have to hand pump it out for now. When it comes time to refuel, then we'll probably have to use our weapons to clear the area. Our main concern is to keep the Lizzars from carrying away anything or anyone. If we can do that without using ammunition, then we might make a case for keeping our clothes."

"That might be fine here, but isn't this war going on elsewhere? I thought you said this was..."

"You're right, I did say that it's global," Colonel Smith replied.

"Wouldn't we be winning a battle only to lose the war? See, I learned something from being your secretary."

"So you did. Yes, it's possible that we could win a battle and lose the war."

"Then it all boils down to what John and the others believe. They gave up what little they had left to fight the Lizzars with. We'd be less

committed if we do any less. Or have I got that backwards?"

"No, I think you stated it correctly. We might have to give our clothing just to show we are as fully committed as our allies. Sub-commander Frea reminded me that some of her warriors gave their lives coming to assist us in defending ourselves and that they're only asking us to give up our clothes in return. I got the impression that they're willing to do nearly all the fighting if we'll only give them the weapons. However, I, for one, do not intend to sit on the sidelines doing nothing."

"In a way, we'd become more primitive in order to make the centaurs more modern. We'd be meeting them half way, so it's not too unreasonable considering what's at stake," she said.

"Yes, I asked John about some other sources for bowstrings. For instance, the American natives used rawhide for theirs. He indicated that if they could find and kill something suitable, they would. However, many of the wild creatures simply aren't like on Earth. Reptilian-like hides aren't anything I've ever heard of anyone using to make bowstrings from. Maybe I can learn more from him or Frea later."

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Sergeant Grim said, "Okay, remember to let them get away from the edge first before you shoot. That way, you'll have more target area to hit with your arrows and we can recover our misses. Any Lizzars who get past us will become targets for the APC's to run over."

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Squad leader Moru shouted, "Sub-commander Frea! Storm approaching!"

Frea turned and glanced at the sky around her. She sniffed the air and knew instantly that Moru was right. There was a storm approaching. She hollered, "All warriors, seek cover! Colonel Smith! There's a storm coming!"

"How bad is the storm going to be?" Colonel Smith asked.

"All storms are bad. My warriors and I will seek shelter and rejoin you later," she replied.

"You're going to leave here even though the Lizzars are still down there?" Smith asked.

"We don't dare stay in the open in the storm's path. Too many coil vines might be carried within it. The Lizzars won't remain outside, either," she answered.

"Coil vines can be carried by storms, Frea?" John asked.

"Very often they are, if the storm is severe enough. We must seek shelter before the storm reaches us," she answered.

"Colonel, you better get everyone of yours in a vehicle or inside your buildings. Once a coil vine grabs you, there's no way to stop it from killing you. The damn thing puts roots into your flesh while it tightens around the body. I've seen a person die from one. She managed about five steps before she was dead," John said.

"Frea, have your warriors seek shelter inside our buildings. Send some of them to each building. We'll remain inside the APC's. Miss Wade, notify all APC's to button up and move in between the buildings. Driver, let me off at whatever building Sub-commander Frea takes shelter in," Colonel Smith said.

Frea glanced over her shoulder as the colonel's APC stopped behind her as she entered the administration building. She asked, when she saw the colonel and Miss Wade exit, "Is there a problem?"

"No, I just want to be with you so we can discuss matters in more detail while the storm passes through. Is that all right with you?"

"Certainly, Colonel. It will give me a chance to learn more about fighting, if you don't mind teaching me."

"We can do that, too. Miss Wade, after you," Smith said.

His APC drove off and John's clanked to a stop near the doorway. John said, "I'm going to stay with the colonel. Check the perimeter once, Jim, and verify that the Lizzars are leaving."

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John walked into the colonel's offices to find the colonel pushing a broom as he swept up the glass from the broken display case.

"Maid's day off. Be careful, there's plenty of slivers in the carpet, John," Mark said.

"Thanks, I'll just try to avoid that spot," John replied.

"I told Mark he didn't have to bother doing that," Frea said.

"Don't throw it away. Use it as a weapon to limit the Lizzars. They don't like walking through broken glass, acid, or fire," John said.

"In that case, John, we'll go around and break out more glass if it can be used," Mark said.

"Later, perhaps," John said.

"Colonel Smith told me about the nudity situation, so you don't have to walk out of the room on my account," Miss Wade said.

"That's for you all to decide. I really don't wish to be brought into the discussion more than necessary. Anyway, I didn't come in to talk about nudity, Miss Wade. As I said to Mark earlier, I hope he takes over leadership of all our people so I can return to being a civilian," John said.

"I take it then that you meant what you said about publicly announcing it," Mark said.

John replied, "I did. I don't like seeing people die or knowing that my decisions send some to their deaths. I was cut out for coaching, not leading armies."

She said, "Since we're all getting on a first name basis, please call me Fawn. Okay?"

"Fine with me, Fawn," John replied.

"Frea and I basically want to talk about the same thing, namely how we're going to fight the Lizzars. Perhaps we should walk through what's left of our museum. There might not be any weapons left, but there are pictures that will illustrate some of my ideas. We'll have less confusion about what I'm saying. John, Fawn, you're both welcome to accompany us," Mark said.

"As an amateur strategist and tactician, I'd very much like to. Thank you, Mark," John said.

Mark exclaimed, "Well, it appears that not everything was taken from the museum. It's a little high up, but I'll find something to climb on and get that crossbow down. It's a weapon of choice in combat. In medieval times, it was outlawed and banned much as people currently on Earth are trying to rid themselves of automatic assault rifles in private hands. I don't think they'll have much more luck than our forebears had."

"It doesn't have a bow as large as mine," Frea said.

"Maybe not, but the wood provides more tension and that makes up for part of the difference. You can see that there's a handle on this end that was also used as a foothold to aid in loading the weapon. Aside from that, it has a stock much like a rifle and permits the user to aim it with more precision than an ordinary bow. It was a real equalizer in its time. I'm not sure, Frea, but I'm willing to bet that you could make one with the right wood and enough strands of your hair braided into a bowstring," Mark replied.

John exclaimed, "Of course! You've just solved one of the biggest problems facing the centaurs! With shorter bows mounted on stocks as crossbows, they could use their hair for the bowstring. Not only that, but it won't take very much hair, either."

"I'm willing to teach you how to braid hair," Fawn said.

Frea exclaimed, "You mean we've had the answer to our problem all along?"

"Well, it wasn't as apparent before. Now, uh, okay, catch it, John! Now, with the crossbow to place beside your long hair, you can see that you have just about enough length to make a bowstring with. And if it breaks, you only need to whack off another braid, assuming that you begin wearing your hair in them constantly, to replace your bowstring and get back into combat relatively quickly," Mark said.

"It's something that the Lizzars can't do. Now every adult centaur can be armed with better weapons than most Lizzars," John said.

"Fawn, I'd very much like to learn your braiding process," Frea said.

"Seems that we've already accomplished more than I expected. Still, I want to talk about one more thing, Frea," Mark said.

She asked, "What's that, Mark?"

Mark answered, "An offensive. We have a saying on Earth that the best defense is a good offense. If we can stick it to the Lizzars and hurt them over and over again, they'll eventually beg for peace."

"We have attacked the Lizzars before, but without any results," she said.

Mark stated, "I'm talking about more than an exploratory attack to hopefully find and free captives as your people were doing when you encountered Conway. What I'm talking about is an extended campaign of terror. We'll put together a force and send it into Lizzar territory with the intention of not returning until we have caused so many casualties that the Lizzars cease to raid your people for captives to enslave. We'll make the Lizzars so afraid of the force we send into their territory that they'll abandon all their other efforts to concentrate solely on it. The force we send in will have to remain in Lizzar territory for months before it returns."

Frea stared at Mark for a moment as she digested his full meaning. She finally asked, "Is that how to win?"

Mark answered, "I think it is. Essentially, you've got a situation here that resembles the American Civil War. The Lizzars fit the description of the North. We fit the description of the South."

"Did the South win?" Frea asked.

John answered, "No, the North won because the South couldn't penetrate the North."

"But it was for reasons that don't apply to you. We have a chance here, a very good chance I might add, to fight that war with the South as the ultimate winner. I'd like to speak with Over Commander Zira soon so we

can organize everything that will be needed for my extended campaign into Lizzar territory," Mark said.

"You will lead the campaign?" she asked.

"Modesty aside, I think I'm the most knowledgeable leader for such an adventure. With me along, such a force will have ready reference to what needs to be done to win. I can't see myself trying to explain something over a radio, assuming you can take one with you, without knowing what the situation is fully like. I'll need to know more things than anyone will be likely to tell me over the radio," Mark answered.

"I think he's right. Such a campaign will need an expert on hand to see that it goes well. Otherwise you're condemning good warriors to useless deaths," John said.

"I think we're getting the storm now," Fawn said.

"Yes, it's on top of us now. A few hours after the storm passes, it could be safe to go outside," Frea replied.

John asked, "What kinds of units are you planning on taking? The APC's?"

Mark answered, "Actually, I was thinking of it being cavalry, and heavy cavalry with human riders on one cohort to give us a mobile infantry element. We simply don't have the fuel to run an extended campaign with the APC's. I believe that those can be used better in defending the border and your camps."

"We won't carry you unless you're naked. The Lizzars have laser towers and portable lasers that we might encounter. Protecting you and your clothing will require too much of the gel. We only use it when we know we have to pass through laser fire since it isn't easy to acquire," Frea said.

Mark asked, "What if we just wear less? Would that be acceptable?"

Frea asked, "How much less? I need to see what you're talking of."

"Excuse me, Fawn, but you may turn around if you like while I undress enough to demonstrate what I'm talking about to Frea," Mark said.

Fawn said, "Uh, Mark, I've already got a naked man standing in front of me. How could I be offended by you stripping down?"

"Sorry. I forgot that John was standing here naked." Mark removed his clothes until he stood in his jock strap and an undershirt. He asked, "Okay, Frea, how's this?" as lightning temporarily illuminated the room.

She moved closer to him and said, "This has to go, but the other isn't at all like most of your clothes. It doesn't fly about in the breeze. We might accept that."

John said, "Just your jock strap, huh?"

Fawn asked, "What about your women, Mark? How little will they have to wear?"

Frea looked at Fawn for a moment during the next lightning flash, then said, "That is clearly too loose. The wind from us running would strip that of protective gel. That would then get you and me killed if I was carrying you."

"Okay, but the female cadets don't wear dresses. They wear uniforms like the colonel was wearing," Fawn said.

"Then they can wear a jock strap, too," Frea said.

"Our females don't wear jock straps, Frea. Only our males because of their private parts," John said.

Frea exclaimed, "Now that I think about it, I can see that it makes sense. Did you know that your males are very tender there?"

"Yes, we all know that," Mark said.

Frea asked, "Then what do your females wear?"

Fawn lifted up her dress. "Panties and bras."

Frea gazed at the panty and bra during the next lightning flash that Fawn exposed to her momentarily. "Those don't flap about. That's good. We might be willing to accept those on females. But why cover your breasts? Don't you want to feel fresh air upon them? Every time I run, it's as if I can feel the soft caresses of my lover upon them. It's something I eagerly look forward to."

"Ahem, one more item, Frea. Our helmets and our flag. We'll want those as well. We'll even provide some of your warriors with helmets to give them added protection," Mark said.

She replied, "I will give those consideration, Mark. Tell me more about this offensive campaign first."

"John, can she speak for her people on this?" Mark asked.

John answered, "Yes. If she agrees to something, the rest of the centaurs will generally back her up. She'd have to be totally unreasonable in her decision for them to rescind their support. This is much easier than dealing with others on Earth where you have to wait until someone higher in authority comes along."

"I'll say," Mark replied.

"If you ditch the tee shirt, she'll assume that you're in agreement so far and what you've thrashed out so far will become binding," John said.

Mark asked, "Will we have to rehash everything if I don't?"

"Not usually," John answered.

"Then for now, I think I'll keep it on. I feel naked already. This, I can

see, will take some getting used to," Mark stated as he moved to one of the picture displays.

"Will I have to go along with this when the agreement is reached? I'd like to know now," Fawn asked.

Mark stopped walking suddenly as he realized that he hadn't considered Fawn's status yet. He turned to her. "I don't know. Do you want to fight? What is her status, John?"

John answered, "Well, the centaurs only have three basic choices, though it appears that a fourth is being developed. One is warrior status. Their second is breeder. The third is trainee status, which includes all their young. The fourth status that's developing is support technician. So far, only one person qualifies for that status because she can repair radios, though I have to admit that she spends time on her back a great deal anyway, so she could also be considered a breeder."

Fawn exclaimed, "A breeder?"

"Essentially a breeder is a free prostitute and mother. All centaurs fight unless they're female and willing to become mothers. Those willing to become mothers make themselves available to all of the warrior class until they become pregnant. Then they might marry and become available only to one warrior from then on. Some warriors marry other warriors but they don't have young if they can avoid it while being intimate," John said.

Mark asked, "You stated that they've been lenient about your people. How would Fawn be affected then?"

"Well, I think they'd probably allow her to be a non-combatant, particularly if they see her have intercourse at least once with one of the men. They realize our temperaments are different from theirs, so they are trying to be considerate of us," John said.

"John is mostly correct. We do understand that you are different in that your males are not always ready as ours are. We've noticed that they're not always aroused by the same female or at the same time. We would prefer to know what status someone holds so we will know how to plan for camp movements and provisioning," Frea said.

"Breeders also gather food for themselves and warriors. For warriors, they gather enough to last the mission. For themselves, they gather what's needed at that time. Mike is the first individual with specialized talents whom they've had to make an exception. They haven't had anyone with specialized talents before. What one of them learned, they all basically learn to do," John said.

"Do I get to choose my status or is that selected for me?" Fawn asked.

"You choose," Frea answered.

"I'm not sure what I want to be. This is so unexpected," Fawn said.

"They've also been lenient toward us because we didn't have enough vehicles to travel in before. They haven't minded some of our people remaining behind since they can't keep up with the cohorts unless they ride on a centaur's back. Some of our people at the base camp are still considered warriors who are responsible for maintaining camp security," John said.

"John is correct about that. We do consider many of his people at the base camp to be warriors. They proved they are during the last attack," Frea said.

"You've been attacked at your camp?" Fawn asked.

John answered, "Yes, they have. There is no safe place on this world. The centaurs see each individual as having one of two responsibilities. Either to preserve life or to create and nourish life. That is their highest priority. Everything else is subordinate to that."

"If you are a breeder, you must show it by being naked always. As a warrior, we will not say anything about you wearing panties and bras though it is your life you risk if those prove to be a weakness for the lasers," Frea said.

"Mark, it's beginning to look like you might get into my panties after all, since I don't know how to fight," Fawn said.

"It's your decision, Fawn," John said.

"I haven't reached any decision yet, Fawn. You don't have to decide anything yet," Mark said.

"Can we return to discussing the offensive?" Frea asked.

"Sorry I dragged the conversation off course. Sure, go ahead and discuss the offensive," Fawn said.

"Basically, I see an offensive with several types of cavalry. One will carry humans who will sometimes fight while mounted and sometimes on foot, depending on the circumstances. Another cavalry unit will have armor somewhat similar to what this picture shows on a horse. The difference will be that we'll try to come up with something appropriate for the upper body instead of what you see here. Kind of like that suit of armor standing in the corner. In fact, some of us might be wearing armor like that as well. Mind you, Frea, it's going to take strong centaurs to carry such loads. You might have to transfer some warriors from one cohort to another," Mark said.

Frea asked, "How many cohorts will be on the offensive?"

Mark answered, "As many as we can have. Personally, I'd like to see ten

cohorts at a minimum. Twenty would be much better."

"We have only eight cohorts and one must be available for camp defense. Generally they are considered to be resting, but they are responsible for defense along with those we keep behind for defense," Frea said.

"Warriors recuperating from wounds are generally used for camp defense. At any one time, there might be as many as fifty recovering from severe wounds. That's another reason why they haven't minded our people being at camp instead of out fighting. We've helped treat the wounded and we're there to augment the defense," John said.

"John's people are very good at treating wounds. Our wounded spend less time now recuperating than ever before," Frea said.

"What are our chances of gaining additional cohorts from other sectors to create a force large enough that the Lizzars will take notice?" Mark asked.

"I don't know. I do know that the sectors are very cooperative," John said.

Frea answered, "If we can show them our intentions and explain how it will benefit them, they will probably send a cohort or two. Don't expect more than that. They must defend their own camps."

Mark asked, "How many sectors are there?" Mark asked.

"Perhaps close to a thousand."

"Okay, Fawn, get some paper and a pencil. A flashlight, too. I need to illustrate something for Frea's benefit. We're not going to see enough by lightning flashes as we've been doing for the last few minutes," Mark said.

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Mark drew a line and then more lines leading from it in only one direction. He said, "This is the border between the Lizzars and everyone else. Each of these lines indicates a sector. Do you follow my drawing so far?"

Frea said, "Yes, I understand it."

"Good. Now, if every sector nearest us sends two cohorts to join our offensive, then we won't have taken away too many warriors from them. Now, to spread out the weakness that we created, the sectors nearest them also contribute a cohort to reinforce all these sectors so that none of them is more than one cohort less than before," Mark said.

Frea asked, "But what of our sector? We will have but one or two

cohorts left.”

“You'll only contribute one or two cohorts as did all the others. This will be a multi-sector force with no one sector dominating it. All participants will be equally responsible for what it accomplishes. Furthermore, we can establish a line of communication among all these sectors by sending an APC to each so they'll have a radio and some people to operate it. In effect, we'll be spreading out John's people so they can't be wiped out all at once. He's already indicated to me that we're considered a valuable resource,” Mark said.

Freya said, “That's true. We do consider you valuable. Some of your people teach us to do things. They are actually what might be considered a new status among us, John.”

“I stand corrected, then. Fawn, if you can teach, then you might fit into that category,” John said.

Freya said, “She might still have to breed. She will definitely have to be naked elsewhere since only our sector is nearly free of laser towers. We haven't drawn off so many Lizzars that everyone else is bothered less by their raids.”

“In that case, I'll have to assign some of my men with rifles to the APC's to deal with the lasers as you stated you're nearly out of ammunition, John,” Mark said.

“Yes, that would be a good idea. Most of my people don't know how to drive an APC, either, so we'll have to have at least one of your people, Mark,” John replied.

“Okay, a cohort is one hundred warriors. That means I can plan on a mobile infantry element of one hundred. I've still got roughly a hundred and thirty personnel, counting everyone. We can send the APC's to sixteen other sectors to establish communications and spread out our people. I can send my wounded and non-combatants with the APC's,” Mark said.

John asked, “What about all the cars you have in back? We can't allow the Lizzars to get hold of those.”

“Well, since you mentioned that the Lizzars are using tire spikes now, those can't be used for combat. Seems to me that their speed makes them suitable for courier service. We can load some of our fuel cans with diesel fuel and get it to the other sectors by courier so the APC's can remain in their sectors. Plus we can quickly send materials we find or capture to the other sectors in the same manner,” Mark said.

Freya said, “If you do those things, I can guarantee that the other sectors will gladly send a cohort to join your offensive force. They already

know that having an APC is worth a couple of cohorts.”

“If you can really guarantee that, I'll make the decision to instruct my troops to strip down to their skivvies,” Mark said.

“She can,” John said.

Fawn asked, “Can I become a courier? I have my car in back.”

“We're going to have to think out this courier service, too. You can't just have one person in a car. They could get lost in this terrain. I think at least two people are going to be needed in each courier vehicle,” John said.

Mark asked, “How many people do you have right now, John?”

“I think I have a hundred and sixteen now,” John answered.

“Okay, it's going to take thirty-two personnel to man all our APC's. We have about two dozen cars out back. That's going to require forty-eight people to put two in each. Then we need to spread out what's left. It appears feasible since we'll have about seventy people left over for spreading about the sectors. That's four or five to each sector,” Mark said.

“Most of my people are women, some of whom are pregnant. Aside from myself, there are twenty-three other men. Most of them will want to be couriers, I believe. They'd probably like to have something else to do other than breed and teach. Basically only nine of us men went out on missions,” John said.

Mark said, “We'll accept volunteers and not try to...”

John interrupted and said, “Couriers are considered warriors and quite respected among the centaurs. I think most of the men would rather be couriers.”

“Then they can volunteer if they want to be well respected,” Mark said.

“And some of my people want to remain warriors,” John said.

“I see. Well, they're welcome to join me provided they'll take orders,” Mark replied.

“I don't think you'll have any problem on that except for clothing. They don't have any. Some of them aren't going to be willing to put on so much as a stitch,” John said.

“We're going to be riding centaurs. From what you told me, they're not going to have any choice in the matter. They'll either wear jock straps or panties or they won't be part of the force,” Mark said.

John asked, “What about your own people? Are you giving them a choice in whether they go out with you?”

Mark answered, “I guess I'm taking it for granted that they want to fight. After all, they entered the academy voluntarily. That means that many of them were planning on a military career. The way I see it, this is

their chance.”

“You may be right about that. Anyway, I hope for the sake of your plan that most of them agree to be warriors,” John said.

Frea said, “We only accept volunteers as warriors, even though we have few choices.”

“You really have only one choice for your males since they can't conceive,” Mark said.

Frea replied, “True enough. I guess we're not so different in some ways from you. Am I to presume that you are going through with our agreement thus far?”

Mark said, as he pulled off his undershirt, “Yes, I'll order my troops to strip down in the morning so they can see me and understand how serious I am about this.”

Fawn asked, “Would you like my support in the morning, Mark?”

“In what way?” asked Mark.

“Will you accept me as a courier?” she asked.

“Yes, I'll accept you as a courier,” he answered.

She said, “Then I'll have to strip down to my undies. If I appear beside you in my bra and panties, the troops will know that you're very serious. Won't they?”

Mark answered, “I suppose they will, at that.”

Fawn reached behind and unbuttoned her dress before she lifted it over her head and removed it. “I guess I better get used to being this way while they last.”

Frea said, “The moons are rising now. You'll better conserve your batteries.”

Chapter 14

Mark woke with a start before he remembered why he was wearing only his jock strap while sleeping on a cot in his office. He glanced around and saw that Frea was awake and watching out the window. John remained asleep on a couch. Fawn was sleeping on another cot in only her underwear. He stared at her for a moment before he felt guilty about seeing so much of her.

“Good morning, Mark. Did you sleep well?” Frea asked.

"You stayed up all night on guard?" he asked.

"No, John shared shifts with me. He's very dependable."

Mark said, "He's a little obstinate on some matters, but I feel his intentions are in the right place. Have the Lizzars shown back up yet?"

She answered, "Not yet. The storm just passed over us. It's still dangerous to be outside. There are plenty of coil vines writhing about on the ground. I feel certain that we still have several hours before the Lizzars can regroup and advance again. Perhaps not until tomorrow."

"In that case, we need to gather the troops together in the Mess Hall so they can eat and I can instruct them on what's happening. Of course, we'll have to get out of here first. Hopefully there will still be enough of us to form an infantry unit when we leave here."

She asked, "How soon do you plan on leaving?"

"As soon as we have just about everything we can carry. We'll have to build a ramp to get the cars down from here, too. That's going to take some time. I expect your reinforcements were delayed by the storm."

"If it passed too close to them, yes."

"Then we probably won't leave until tomorrow or the day after. We'll try to fight the Lizzars with arrows instead of bullets," Mark said.

Frea said, "The Lizzars won't be very likely to stick around here too long after we leave. The vines will have attached to many of the bodies left about. In a few years, this will be surrounded by a dangerous forest."

"If I thought we could hold out that long, I'd stay since the APC's are sufficient protection against the coil vines."

"Then perhaps you'll return someday."

Mark went over to the radio. "Time to wake the troops."

• • •

Mark checked the doorway for coil vines before he left the office to enter the APC that pulled up almost to the door. Some of the troops inside stared at him before shifting their eyes to Fawn who followed right behind him.

"I'll explain all of this in the Mess Hall. Frea and John are remaining here, driver. Let's go," Mark said.

• • •

Mark received even more stares from his troops as he entered the Mess Hall where they were eating cold breakfasts. As before, the eyes of the

troops silently shifted almost immediately to Fawn who followed him inside. Only a few soldiers weren't in the Mess Hall as they remained inside the APC's to drive those out of the way and keep them secure. Mark made his way to get something to eat and then stopped once he reached the center of the room before going to his table.

"Okay, I know you're all wondering what happened to my uniform and Miss Wade's clothes. I'm going to explain that right now. Then I'm going to sit down and eat my breakfast while each of you goes about doing what needs to be done," Mark said.

"First of all, we're on a new world. Any doubts some of you might have had about that should have been completely dispelled by the sight of three moons in the sky last night. That's if the presence of the Lizzars and our allies, the centaurs, wasn't already enough. I've been in deep discussion with John Weaver, past commander of the human forces, and Sub-commander Frea of the Fifth Cohort. From them, I've learned an awful lot about this world that we need to know if we're to survive. As well, I've made recommendations and reached an agreement with them as to how to best survive."

"For one thing, the Lizzars have laser cannon. The centaurs have developed a counter for that, but you have to be naked or nearly so to use it. Loose clothing causes the protective gel to flake off. So it's either be naked or fry. The centaurs are agreed that dressed as minimally as Miss Wade and myself are now is acceptable since neither of us have any loose clothing to flap about and nullify the protective gel when it's applied. After you finish breakfast, you're to all report to your quarters, remove what you're wearing, and report back for duty dressed as one of us are, according to your gender. This is for your protection. The Lizzars do have portable laser cannon, though they can't move them very fast. We might find ourselves facing that threat which is why we'll be ready for it ahead of time. No, no! There's no need to stand up and strip down now! Keep your seats and finish your breakfast. Once you remove your clothes, you're to turn those in. Those will be used to make weapons. Again, it's a choice of whether our force is going to be better armed than the Lizzars or not. You and I know that the force with better weapons stands a better chance of winning. Since the Lizzars will only accept us as slaves, we have little choice about who we're fighting against or how."

"The Lizzars only allow their slaves to wear chains. I feel quite well dressed right now," Fawn said.

"Uh, thank you, Miss Wade. Additionally, we'll be sending out as much

gear as we can in the APC's and cars. The wounded will be in the APC's or cars. The rest of us will be riding on centaurs to leave this site once we have everything of value packed up. Miss Wade has a list of what is considered essential. Each APC will later move to one of the buildings to load up fully. The centaurs will provide for our defense while we clear everything of value out. We also have four more centaur cohorts on the way here, so there will be plenty of mounts to carry us all out of here. After we're safely disengaged from the enemy, some of you will be assigned to other sectors along with an APC. Miss Wade has a list of assignments, as well," Mark said.

"Now I've reached the one last item I wish to speak with you about. The centaurs have only two main classifications. One is to be a warrior. I don't think anyone needs any explanation about what that is. The second is as a breeder. This needs clarification. First of all, it really only applies to women. Since we have some women among us, you women will have an opportunity to make a choice. Essentially, what it means is that you may choose to be a warrior or a camp prostitute available to any man who wants you. If you wish to remain a warrior, then dress appropriately. If you'd rather be a breeder, than report back for duty with nothing on. Breeders are always naked."

"Warriors may choose to be naked, but we're going to maintain some sense of modesty while our clothing lasts. To you men here, I can only warn you that you don't want to ride on a centaur with your grapes hanging loose. You'll regret it within the first few seconds of riding and I won't give you any sympathy or ask the centaurs to slow down for your comfort. All of you better plan on keeping whatever you have in the way of jock straps, panties, and bras if you're a warrior. All other clothing is to be turned in, no matter how sentimental you feel about it. I do not want to hear of anyone being hazed because they have more or less than anyone else inside their underwear. Nor do I want any comments concerning what underwear some of you may have stashed away somewhere and finally pull out of hiding to turn in. I know that some of you have kept some personal items since I've come across some before in previous years during inspections."

Fawn whispered, "Remember the bows, sir."

"One more item I almost forgot. If any Lizzars manage to slip in and threaten you, you are to use bows and arrows to kill them. Use your other weapons only as a last resort. We must conserve our rifle ammunition for use against the enemy's lasers. Now finish your breakfast and then do as I've instructed. All staff members are to gather at my table for briefing,"

Mark said.

• • •

"Miss Wade has volunteered to assist in making quivers to hold arrows. See to it that she gets the most durable material available for that purpose. If you have anyone who can sew, send them to assist her," Mark said.

He noticed the nods among his remaining staff before he went on.

"I didn't tell everything I know about how the centaur society functions. Nor did I tell about how the humans here function. Suffice it to know, your troops will learn soon enough, so you can expect some trouble now and then dealing with sexual relationships. There are just about enough women in the centaur camp now to handle whatever comes up. Most, but not all, have become breeders so they won't have to fight. I can't really blame them since many of them don't know how to fight. Others are teachers and one is a technician. Specialized skills are very scarce on this world and valued beyond having to fit into the current society. Essentially, the centaur society is being forced to adapt to new circumstances, namely us. It is up to us to keep our people in line without jeopardizing the alliance or our security. Anyway, this leads to another point. We need people who know how to handle tools so we can take some of the sheet metal we have to do a number of projects."

"One project is to armor the cars so they can drive in the open without worrying about a spear or sword coming through the window. Or an arrow. Some of you saw what was done to the cars John's people used. We'll do somewhat the same to ours. As well, we need to make some armor much like medieval knights placed on their mounts. We might not have enough material to make armor for every centaur, but I'd like to see us make as much as possible until we run out of resources."

"Another is to prepare some armor for people to wear while standing in a car or an APC hatch so they can fire at the enemy without worrying about being hit by arrows or spears. For the most part, this means only from the waist up. That should reduce how much we have to make. Some of you will be wearing this armor as some of you will be assigned to other sectors and will be in charge of our people in that sector. You'll also train the centaurs in tactics and use of weapons."

"The rest of us will be mounting a major offensive that I predict will last three to six months to relieve the pressure on the centaur camps. That

means I'll need recommendations from you on suitable candidates to become permanent squad and platoon leaders. I intend to form a mobile infantry unit of one hundred individuals, including myself. Very likely I'll organize the unit into two platoons, each with five squads. That means I need ten competent leaders from among our cadets. Discuss this among yourselves and give me a list by the end of the day. Or you can give the names to Miss Wade, who has volunteered to be a courier. She'll have to be fitted for armor, as well."

"We also need individuals skilled in woodworking. They're to begin production on making crossbows using the one that Sub-commander Frea now has as their prototype to go on. If you have to dismantle part of a building to get enough wood, then do so. I want as many as you can produce before we leave here."

Sergeant Grim said, "I can work wood."

Mark said, "In that case, you're in charge of that project. Who knows metal?"

Sergeant Lott replied, "You'll probably want me then for that project."

"Okay then, you have your assignments. If anyone doesn't have a jock strap, raid the lockers and dresser drawers of the dead and wounded. We need at least three for some of the men who came to our rescue so they can ride centaurs out of here. Like I said before, there are to be no comments or hazing of individuals because they pull out something sexy and wear it so long as it isn't frilly and doesn't flap about. The centaurs are concerned about that issue. I don't blame them since someone who's hit and falls off a centaur could trip others coming up behind them. If the underwear has loose frills, just have those cut off," Mark said.

Sergeant Grim asked, "What about pistol belts?"

Smith answered, "They'll be allowed provided they're fitted snugly around the waist. Most likely they'll have to be taken off if you enter into known laser areas and stored away in protected sacks until you're safely out."

Sergeant Lott asked, "Sunglasses okay?"

"I don't know. For now, I'm saying yes. If I'm wrong, then we'll have to make do without them. By the way, most of the tee shirts should be useable as bandages. The centaurs have virtually nothing to bandage their wounds with. What they got from Conway is nearly gone now. You'll find an extensive list of what's to be taken away from here with Miss Wade. If anyone should come across something not on the list or think of something not on it, bring it to our attention immediately. Things that we used to take

for granted could very well be important now," Smith said.

• • •

Ray stood in his jock strap with his pistol belt around his waist as he inspected each female cadet closely to see that her underwear wasn't frilly and that she kept only her underwear. Everything else had to be carried downstairs and handed over. He said nothing when one of the women noticed that his jock strap was straining outward. Instead, he continued with his inspection until he'd checked each woman. It wasn't as easy as his inspection of the men in his platoon. He had only four of them left. As it was, he needed to inspect only one item of wear on them. Ray quickly finished his inspection in record time. "Martine, front and center!"

"Yes, sergeant?" she asked as she came over to stand in front of him while trying her best to keep her eyes averted from his bulging jock strap.

"Colonel Smith wanted recommendations from his staff on who to promote permanently. I heard some good things about how you took over at the armory. I've already put you in for promotion and you've been approved. Find yourself a pair of sergeant stripes and sew them onto your, uh, panties. One on each side, I guess. You can rescue some from my fatigues."

She asked, "What about you, sergeant? I can sew yours on while I'm at it if you like."

Ray said, "Uh, yeah, I am a bit out of uniform. Thank you." He removed two spares from inside a pouch on his pistol belt and handed those over to her.

"Don't you want stripes on all your straps?" she asked.

"I can probably take care of these later."

"I don't see what you're being so modest about. We can already see half of you in your current condition."

Ray glanced down and saw that she was correct. His jock strap bulged out so far that the hidden part of him showed clearly from the sides. Without a word, he reached down and slipped them down from his waist and thighs before letting them fall to his ankles. He stepped out of them with one foot and then lifted his other foot to take them completely off before handing them over to her.

She asked, "On the sides? There's only a narrow band there."

"Front and back sides then, Martine. Same way with yours. Please don't leave me hanging out like this for too long. I'd appreciate it if you'd do one

of mine first and send it to me at the maintenance shop. Now do any of you have experience working with wood? I need anyone with even minimum experience at cutting and shaping wood. I have to make as many crossbows as possible before we leave. The only way I'm going to accomplish that is to have as many people working as we have tools for."

Two women stepped forward.

Sergeant Grim said, "Okay, you two are to report to the maintenance shop now. Tuck your spare underwear into an ammo pouch and follow me."

• • •

After Sergeant Grim was gone, Martine gasped, "God, I can't believe I talked him out of his jock strap. Did you see the hunk of meat hanging between his legs?"

Wallensky said, "I never knew before that any man had that much. Well, except for that guy John who showed up yesterday. Grim's nearly as big as John. Do they all have that much?"

"I don't think so. I just hope I haven't gotten Sergeant Grim in trouble with the colonel. I better hurry and get those stripes on," Martine said.

"Need any help?" Wallensky asked.

"Sure, if you're any better at sewing than I am."

• • •

Fawn climbed out from the APC's rear hatch after unlocking the car door. She had to just barely open it and roll the window down before she could enter the car without treading on any coil vines. She slid into the driver's seat and started the engine before the APC pulled away. She followed the APC closely to the maintenance shop where the car would be modified before she went after another. She didn't even bother to glance out over the plain to see if the Lizzars were back yet.

• • •

Sergeant Grim sat on one of the chairs at the work bench where he took apart the working crossbow Frea handed back over. He marked out the pieces with pencil against stocks of wood he'd already selected. He was glad that part of his anatomy was no longer directly visible. He still possessed an erection that he was embarrassed for the two women beside him to see.

To make matters worse, one woman earlier brushed up against him and

his member had throbbed and bobbed about as if eager to have her. He couldn't admit it, but under different circumstances he wasn't sure if he could have so easily restrained himself from the temptation she so clearly presented. He handed one stock of wood to one woman to pass on down the table to some men who volunteered from the other platoons to work on making crossbows.

Ray felt bad about one of the other men who was also nude while his jock straps were similarly adorned with sergeant stripes. The man had seen the two women volunteers and become similarly aroused until he saw Ray. Then the man had become all limp as if recognizing that he couldn't compete.

• • •

"Okay, this takes care of Sergeant Grim's first strap. We need to get it over to him so he won't get into trouble with the colonel," Martine said.

"You want to take it since I sew better?" Wallensky asked.

"Sure, I can do that," Martine answered.

"Okay, slip out of yours so I can do them while you're gone."

"Mine?" asked Martine.

"Hey, I don't know how long you'll take to get there with all these vines about. You might be gone long enough for me to do all of yours before I have to turn over this machine to someone else. Besides, Grim didn't have any problem with taking his off. Now give!"

Martine reluctantly slipped out of her panties. She handed them over to Wallensky before she made for the front door with Sergeant Grim's jock strap in her hand.

• • •

The APC pulled up to the front door and backed in close enough that a person could step from the open hatch into the building without touching the ground. Martine blushed as Colonel Smith stepped out with his jock straps in his hand and a number of cloth colonel's insignia to be sewn on. "Relax, sergeant. Haven't you seen a naked colonel before?"

"No sir. I was concerned that you might be embarrassed to see a nearly naked sergeant," she replied.

Smith glanced at the jock strap in her hand, then asked, "That must be for someone else then since I don't think you'd have need for one quite like that."

"It's, uh,...yes, sir."

"Relax, sergeant. We're operating under difficult conditions. No need to become flustered. You're a sergeant now. As such you should be able to deal with any situation, even if you're naked. If you tell who that belongs to, I'll see that he gets it while you return to sewing your own stripes on."

"Private Wallensky is sewing on the rest of mine and his."

"Fine, then perhaps she might not mind sewing my insignia on for me."

Martine said, "I'll see to it, sir. This is Sergeant Grim's jock strap. He's at..."

"I know where he's at. I'm going there next anyway to check on our progress. You go ahead and finish up here. I'm sure you have other things to do than deliver jock straps."

She asked, "What about yours? Should I deliver them to you, sir?"

"I'll pick them up later. There's no need to search me out just so no one will see part of me flopping about. Sooner or later, it's going to be seen anyway. Once we hit the field, we're not going to have any privacy when we take a shit or a bath. Otherwise, I might be concerned about some of my people running around naked or half-naked. Just remember, there's nothing to be embarrassed about when conditions make something necessary as they are now. By the way, you're to also get a sidearm issued to you now that you're a non-com."

Sergeant Martine said, "Of course! That must be why Sergeant Grim said for the ranks to be on the front and back instead of the sides."

"You're catching on quickly," Smith said before turning to re-enter the APC with Sergeant Grim's jock strap.

She asked, "You sure you don't want to wait just five minutes to have one strap fixed up?"

"I'll get them all later, thanks."

• • •

When Sergeant Grim heard the voice shout, "Attention!" he started to rise and stand at attention. He gave no thought to his nudity.

"As you were everyone! We're dispensing with formalities temporarily. Sergeant Grim!"

Ray turned to face the colonel, expecting to be chewed out for being naked. Instead, he saw Colonel Smith walking toward him with just as little on and holding out a jock strap with sergeant's stripes sewn onto the front and back.

"I believe this is yours. You can pick up the rest of your straps later. If there's anyone else in here naked while their uniform is being prepared, rest assured that you are not in trouble. After all, I'm having to walk around out of uniform for the same reason. Carry on now. Sergeant, how is the work progressing?"

"We're just getting the materials cut from the stock we have on hand. I'd say that we'll be assembling our first new crossbows within an hour. Once we find out what problems we're facing in making these, I can then estimate how many we can produce per hour," Ray answered as he stepped into his jock strap and pulled it up to his waist.

"Okay, that sounds good. As soon as you have some working production models, issue them out so we can test them under battle conditions while we still have the makings to repair or modify them into worthy weapons. Commandeer anything you need to make these with unless it's from another working weapon," Smith said.

Ray asked, "Are the Lizzars back yet?"

"No, sergeant. They're still having to deal with the coil vines and they don't have APC's, thank god, to get past those with. There's a real chance that we won't have to concern ourselves with them for another six hours or more, if at all today," Smith answered.

"Then we should have a lot of crossbows ready by then. At least, I hope we will," Ray said.

"I'm confident that you and your volunteers will do your best. Go ahead and return to your work. I'll just watch for awhile and then move out of your hair," Smith said.

• • •

Martine slipped on her panties and gazed down at herself, still hardly able to believe that she was a sergeant. Still, she had the rank on her front and back of her panties to show that she was. "How do I look?" Martine asked.

"Well, like a sergeant, I guess," Wallensky replied.

"Yeah, I guess I do. Remember how we used to joke about the sergeants having their rank on their underwear?"

Wallensky said, "Sure. Now we know it's true, huh?"

"Yeah...Well, not exactly since this isn't underwear any longer. It's outer wear. I'm wondering though if I should continue to wear a bra or not. Do you think it would upset the colonel?"

"You looking to being busted in rank before you have a chance to enjoy it?" Wallensky asked.

"Not exactly, but it's just that I'm not sure about how I feel dressed like this. I never did like bras."

Wallensky said, "Yes, I know. I've walked in on you enough after duty to see you bare chested to know that. Still, I don't think the colonel is going to appreciate that for now. I wouldn't tempt fate by taking a chance yet. Get to know him better before you do anything."

"I suppose you're right."

Wallensky said, "Hand me another of the colonel's jock straps."

"I hope we don't get these mixed up," Martine said.

Wallensky held up one of Sergeant Grim's beside the one for the colonel. She asked, "Do you really think we can mix these up?"

Martine said, "I guess not. There is a definite difference in size."

• • •

Ray assembled the first crossbow and test fired it. The bolt, though it was actually an arrow from one of the archery sets, flew a straight and true course toward the target. His aim wasn't too far off the center. "Well, we can definitely make crossbows. Let's get more of these assembled and tested. Now that we know this works, we can give the original back to Sub-commander Frea."

Frea said, "I'll be happy even with the new crossbow. That way you may keep the original for tracing."

Ray replied, "Okay, here you go. Use it in good health."

• • •

John looked in on the maintenance shop. Although he was concerned about the crossbows, he was more concerned about the cars as they were something the centaurs couldn't make. It wasn't going very well that he could see, if only because there was a lack of sheet metal for the overall task.

Sergeant Lott, wearing only a pistol belt, came over to him and asked, "How did you solve your lack of sheet metal for your cars?"

"We ransacked the town and took it from anything we couldn't use anymore. We took apart the freezers in the grocery store. Wall lockers from the gym. You name it, we used it," John answered.

"Okay, now I know where to get material from. Everyone, except you

two, get your tools and follow me. We're going on a scavenger hunt," Sergeant Lott ordered.

• • •

Frea scanned the horizon with the pair of military binoculars given to her by the colonel. She was amazed at how much better they were than what her people already had from the town of Conway. She was just barely able to make out the first of the Lizzar units returning as they knocked aside loose coil vines with their outstretched spears. They weren't making very fast progress. She estimated that it would still be some hours before they even reached near the island. They might even wait until the next day before launching their assault so the coil vines would be largely inactive and harmless.

As she watched, she was aware that the cohort reinforcements were probably similarly being held up. They would deal with the matter differently by acquiring a log and rolling it in front of them until it became too big and heavy to prod forward. Then another log would be shoved out in front of them to gather up the loose coil vines.

Colonel Smith came in the building from his APC and stopped beside her. She noticed that he didn't have on his jock strap and asked, "Have you decided that nude is better?"

He answered, "I'm having my insignia of rank sewn onto my jock straps. We use such methods to keep track of our rank structure."

"Oh, my mistake. I was hoping that you were trying the waters as I've heard some of your people say so colorfully," she said.

"I'm sure that eventually we'll have to go about our lives nude. Until then, this is a way for us to make the transition and learn more about ourselves. We need to learn to better trust ourselves and each other before we dispense with all our clothes."

"I think I understand. It's because your society is so very different from ours."

"In some ways, but not in others. I'm sure we'll learn from each other as time marches on," Smith replied.

"I can just barely see the Lizzars now. They're not moving fast and we still have hours before they'll get close enough to attack. If we leave the island cluttered with coil vines, they'll have to wait until at least tomorrow before they dare launch their assault."

"I'm not having any of the area cleared. Everyone is moving about by

APC. How about your warriors? Do they need to get out for anything?"

She answered, "We're making do for the time being. Thank you for asking."

"I presume our reinforcements are facing the same problem as the Lizzars are."

"They are, but they'll make better time."

He said, "I hope you're right about that."

• • •

Sergeant Lott walked into the women's wing without concerning himself about how they were dressed, expecting them to be wearing their panties and bras if any of them were still present. He couldn't help but notice the woman who was removing a severely torn pair of panties to slip on another pair. She smiled bravely before she finished redressing and left.

"Okay, men, get those wall lockers taken apart. Carry them down to the APC. When we finish this floor, we'll move down to the next floor and do the same. Just remember, each floor is closer to the APC, so the work will get easier. If you find anything still in the lockers, set it aside where it can be found by the owner. Don't take anything that's not yours," he said.

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Frea said, "Much of the slope surrounding us is crumbling. I don't know if that will make it easier or harder for the Lizzars when they attack."

"I should think it will make it more difficult for them to get up but easier for us to get down. I'm most concerned about the cars getting bogged down in the loose soil and mud. We can free them with tow lines if we're not under heavy attack," Mark said.

She asked, "What if we are?"

"Then we might have to destroy them. That or we'll have to let some of our vehicles go on while the rest of us do our best to hold out against the Lizzars."

"Couldn't we go ahead and do the offensive against these Lizzars?"

He answered, "Not until I've had time to train your cohorts in what's expected of them. We don't have the time or space to do so now. Not with those coil vines about."

• • •

Martine said, "Never thought I'd be running around in my underwear

among a hundred men in theirs loading APC's with just about everything that's not nailed down."

"You said it, sergeant," Wallensky replied.

"Have they taken apart our beds or do we get to sleep on them tonight?"

Wallensky said, "I've wondered about that, too. We're not even going to have sheets or blankets. It's going to feel strange sleeping without anything on me at all tonight."

"Unless we're in the APC's again," Martine said.

"Ugh! I don't think I can stand another night sleeping in grungy clothes. If all us women are in one APC tonight, will you care if I sleep in the raw?" Wallensky responded.

"If it's just us women, go ahead. Are you ready to start moving out stuff from the second floor?"

"Yes. I'm right behind you," Wallensky replied.

Sergeant Martine opened the door to one of the sergeants' quarters and stopped dead in her tracks. She looked at John as he made love to one of the women who arrived with him in astonishment. "Uh, sorry. I, uh, thought this room was unoccupied so we could empty it."

"Then empty it. We just wanted to use the bed for a change instead of the ground," John said.

Wallensky asked, "You don't mind us seeing you like that?"

Wendy said, "It's not going to be the first time we were watched. If you get a chance, you ought to try John. He's wonderful in bed or on the ground. Ahhh! That's another good one, John!"

"Go on with what you were doing. Don't mind us. Just empty out what you want," John said.

Martine and Wallensky gingerly walked around the bed to the closet. They both glanced over between John's legs before glancing at each other.

Wallensky whispered, "God, he's as big as a centaur, almost."

Martine turned back to stare while she reached for the closet doorknob. She fumbled about before she finally had to look for it. Opening it, she let her attention wander back to the couple in bed. Wendy moaned several more times and gripped John roughly by his ass and pulled him deep inside her where she held him tightly with her arms and legs.

"Ohhh! God, this was wonderful, John! I'm going to miss having you when I go out on the offensive," Wendy gasped.

"I just hope that you'll take care of yourself out there," he said while his body shuddered as he released more of himself into her.

Wallensky whispered, "God, she's got all of him in her!"

"I can see that. I've got to get out of here before I lose my cool," Martine said.

Martine grabbed Wallensky by the elbow as she turned to leave. Martine said, "We'll hit this room later. Sorry to intrude."

Wendy said, "I don't mind. I do better when I have an audience. Sure you don't want to try John now? He should still be good for about three more rounds."

"I have work to do. Thanks, anyway," Martine said.

Wendy watched the two women leave and close the door. "They were looking at you inside me. I could tell by their faces that they couldn't believe how large you are with a hard on."

"Were they that shocked?"

"Some, but I could see that they were both intrigued by the thought of having you. Anyway, I gave them a chance to say yes. You ready to go again?" Wendy answered.

"Yes, but I think we better let them get to this room before we do. Best if we stay out of the way for now and slip back in later," John replied.

"Oh, you can slip in anytime."

• • •

"Okay, now that you're sergeants, you'll be giving orders that I'll expect the troops to obey. If you have any trouble for now, my experienced sergeants will be available to guide you and ease the transition. We're not playing anymore. The APC's are too full now for everyone to sleep in tonight. You can tell your squads that they may sleep in their rooms tonight when they're not on guard. They'll be posted either in one of the APC's or at one of the fortified windows. Sergeants, I expect you to post your guards and check up on them regularly. The guards inside the APC's may sleep inside those after they secure their hatches. So long as the APC's are secured from the inside, there's no real need for any of you to go outside to check on them, so restrict your checks to the guards posted inside the buildings," Colonel Smith said.

"I've spoken with Frea. She's agreed that it will be good for each guard post to have one centaur and one human so they can talk and our people can learn about them. That should keep everyone awake since I'm sure they'll have plenty to talk about. Much as I'd like to, I've been advised not to restrict the topics they may discuss. We have more than enough people

to spread the responsibility around. Guards will be changed every two hours. Sergeants, you'll each have a shift of four hours. Check the list for your times. Then notify your personnel who have guard duty of their shifts. You may advise your troops that we'll have a hot meal for breakfast tomorrow. Any questions?"

Smith glanced around the room at his sergeants, most of whom wore only a jock strap, web belt, and a holster attached to the belt. Only one wore panties and a bra instead of the jock strap while the rest of her gear was identical. No one had any questions.

"Okay, now let's lighten up a bit and discuss the problems and solutions we had today. First of all, just about everyone reached the same conclusion that our jobs took precedence even if we had to walk around with our privates hanging out while our new uniforms were prepared." Mark paused for the polite chuckles that came from the sergeants. He then went on. "You all handled the situation well and set a good example. Eventually we won't have any choice about being naked. When that comes about, I hope we do as well then as we did today with just a few of us. So long as the problems are prevented, I'm not going to be tough about how we're dressed during some circumstances. After all, we'll have to bathe in groups, take craps while someone watches our backs, and whatever else comes along. You might have to tell some of the men or even the women to put their eyes back in their sockets and what not in order to keep order. Use some finesse, rather than force, to calm down such situations when those occur."

"After tonight, we're probably going to see some fraternization among the troops. I've decided to use some of John's suggestions in dealing with some problems. So long as it's consensual, I'm not going to bust anyone. On the other hand, I'm not going to put up with rape or other forced behavior. Anyone caught doing so will be shot. If I'm not around to enforce this rule, my new XO, Sergeant, soon to be Major, Evan will. Likely he'll be wandering around buck naked tomorrow while his jock straps are redone. I'm still going over everything, so there will likely be more promotions among yourselves and the troops. I'll be announcing promotions to lieutenant and corporal tomorrow."

"Miss Wade said that the sewing can be handled by a smaller group. There were a few too many helpers in there today. She's already stated who she'd like to have back. That list is also posted. Now let's get to the more serious matters. First off, how many cars were finished today?"

Sergeant Lott stated, "Only three. It was mostly a learning process that

would have gone worse if John hadn't steered us in the right direction at first. We avoided a lot of mistakes, so I feel confident that we can do more tomorrow. We do have two vehicles I'm concerned about since no one knows how to armor a motorcycle."

Mark asked, "John, what's your opinion?"

"Those should definitely be kept. They could prove handy for rough terrain where the cars can't go and an APC isn't available. They're fast, light, and small so they're difficult targets for the Lizzars to hit, let alone get close to. For now, I suggest sticking them inside APC's until we get out of here," John said.

Mark said, "Okay, there's your answer, Sergeant Lott. Sergeant Grim, how's the crossbow production?"

Ray stepped forward and answered, "Much better than I hoped for. We found ourselves completing an average of eight each hour after we discovered that some of the details could be dealt with later."

"Such as?" asked the colonel.

"Such as rounding some of the corners on the stocks, sanding some burrs, minor things like that. When we quit doing that, we found ourselves producing twelve in an hour. That was what brought our average up. After we get started tomorrow, we should hit our stride by the second hour and could produce close to a hundred crossbows. The only thing limiting us is resources. We're already out of some things, but we found substitutes and didn't get slowed down too much today. So long as we can find substitutes, we'll reach that goal."

"In that case, keep working at it. We have four cohorts due here soon. Freya spotted them with her binoculars, so there's no longer any doubt that they're coming. Giving them crossbows could be one of the nicest gifts they ever received. However, remember that our troops also need them. As soon as we arm the two cohorts already here, begin arming those soldiers of ours who don't already have bows. That will give us a nice mix for battle. After our people are armed, then we'll produce more for our new guests," Mark said.

Ray answered, "Yes sir. I think if I had a couple more personnel gathering material, we might increase our output."

Mark said, "You need them, you've got them. How many?"

"Five should be enough to procure materials."

Mark glanced around, then said, "Sergeant Martine, you're in charge of materials procurement for Sergeant Grim. See me if the procurement team for Sergeant Lott and you have any questions about who gets what when

something is needed by both of you. Otherwise, you're authorized to go anywhere on this compound and take what's needed. Anyone who thinks something they own is more important than everyone else's lives has some growing up to do and me to deal with. However, you shouldn't have any trouble of that sort in all likelihood. There isn't very much private property on this compound. The majority is academy property and you don't have to ask me to take it. Just remember that you can't destroy one weapon to make another."

• • •

Sub-commander Theo studied the rutted slope leading to the academy grounds. Theo was glad they had reached the island before dark. He pointed upwards while carefully stepping aside for his warriors to climb up. When the last warriors from his cohort reached the slope, he climbed as well.

Even up on the academy grounds, he found the going was still slow as the grounds were liberally littered with coil vines. Since his warriors didn't have anymore logs to clear the way, the first few warriors reached out with their spears and carefully swept the vines to the sides.

• • •

John couldn't help but notice that Theo appeared sad when Theo's eyes fell on him. It took John a moment before he reached the right conclusion, though he hoped he was wrong.

Theo said, "We found four of your people dead in their cars. The coil vines fell inside during the storm and killed them. One man managed to crawl out before he died. Another was hanging down by his legs. Neither of the women managed to even get out of their seats. The vines were wrapped tightly around them and the backs of their seats. We had to cut them loose to get their bodies out."

"I was afraid that you had bad news to tell me. Anything else would have come over the radio. I guess they never had a chance to call," John said.

Frea clasped one arm around John's shoulders and pressed him against her as he sobbed for a moment.

"I'll be okay. Thanks," John said.

Theo said, "I left six warriors with the cars to take them back to camp. It was too late to do anything but bury your people. I said some words over

them as you have before. Was that okay?"

John answered, "Very okay, friend Theo. I appreciate you giving them a proper burial."

• • •

Mark sat down behind his desk. He immediately noticed that the metal handles were missing. He said, "It's too bad that we can't carry away everything."

"We're each willing to carry what we can," Theo said.

"I'll let you, but there's still too much stuff to carry off," Mark said.

"I've an idea for how to hide what we can't take and don't want to destroy," John said.

Mark asked, "What's your idea?"

"Bury it," John said.

"They'll just dig them back up," Mark said.

"Not if there are dead Lizzars covered with coil vines on top. They'll probably never even stop to think about searching under a bunch of dead Lizzar bodies. Except in their camps and possibly their cities, they don't bother disposing of their dead as we do. All we have to do is dig deep enough, bury what we can't take that's of lesser importance but still useful in plastic bags, and then cover the site with their bodies and some loose coil vines. When the Lizzars see that, they'll think we simply got the bodies out of our way as we've done before. Our best location is between two of the buildings where they can't see what's going on," John explained.

Mark asked, "Frea, Theo, do you agree with John's idea?"

"I was with John before he was captured. He's correct about the Lizzars being aware that we move bodies out of our way. They'll probably believe that's what we did when they see a pile of their dead," Frea answered.

Theo nodded his head.

"On top of that, you've already done the same thing so it's not going to be considered out of pattern for your troops to do this," John said.

"Okay, get to it as quickly as possible. What we can't take or bury in time will have to be destroyed, much as I hate to limit us later," Mark said.

"I agree, but doing this means we can leave that much sooner," John said.

"It does, but it won't cause me to sleep any better later. When we leave, I want someone to watch behind us. If we determine that the Lizzars are digging up our treasure, then we'll turn around and attack them," Mark

said.

"And booby trap it. Put a grenade on the bottom with the pin pulled and we'll put together some chlorine gas bombs. We'll be far enough away that the chlorine gas cloud we create won't kill anyone but Lizzars," John said.

Mark exclaimed, "Now you're talking! That I approve of! By the time they recover, we'll be back and on top of them."

"Or we'll have incendiary devices set to go off with the grenade. They'll still get nothing," John said.

Theo said, "Put some chlorine bombs inside the buildings to discourage them from searching."

"Okay, we have a general plan here. Let's get this into some semblance of order before we begin digging in the morning. Since we need to keep the enemy from seeing us dig, we'll have to block two angles with APC's..."

Mark stopped when he spotted Sergeant Martine walking past his office in only her panties while yawning. Some of the others glanced out in time to see her walk by.

"I hope you're not going to get on her case, Mark," John said.

"No, I'm not, John. I figured there would be people too tired by now to know which way is up. I'm surprised that she even remembered her panties. She's going to be a good leader eventually. I saw that much in her performance under fire. Frankly, I won't be surprised to find some of the guards naked tonight when I check on them, too. All that matters is that they're alert to enemy activity. I'll honestly settle for just that," Mark replied.

"If that's the case, you'll have few problems with some of my people who join you. You'll probably have close to twenty women in your force," John said.

"Because they're experienced in dealing with this world and speak the language, I'm looking forward to having them join. I guess if they don't wear anything, I really can't get too upset with my soldiers for following their example. I was hoping that they would wear something so I could keep sexual relationships from getting out of hand too soon. Being naked, they could present a strong temptation to some of the men," Mark said.

"Just tell the men that they used to be cops. That should cool them off for awhile," John said.

"Okay, let's get back to our plan for hiding what we can't take with us," Mark said.

Chapter 15

John looked out the window at the area the men were busy digging. They were thoroughly hidden behind the APC's so the Lizzars couldn't see what was going on. As well, each APC had someone in the open upper hatch manning a machine gun in case the Lizzars managed to storm the island sooner than expected. Stacks of equipment and supplies that might be useful later stood in a first floor room with a window overlooking the site. As soon as the hole was large enough, the goods would be handed out through the window to be placed in the hole.

He walked down the hall to the other side of the building and stared out onto the plain. The Lizzars were nearly all around the island once more and preparing to charge. As near as he could tell, they were waiting until they had the entire island surrounded. He could see that they had definitely learned a lot of military discipline since he first encountered them in battle. Then again, he knew they had to since they were finally up against someone who knew more tricks than they did. They couldn't win anymore by weight of sheer numbers, though that was still a factor in their plan. Even as he stood watching, their numbers grew steadily as the depth of their units in some places around the island increased. John walked back to his room and smiled at Wendy as she woke up while he picked up his crossbow.

"Good morning, lover. You were terrific last night," she said.

"As were you. I slept soundly after our lovemaking. Thank you."

"You're welcome. So, have you nailed any of those new women yet?"

"Not yet. You know me. I always leave it up to the women. I never force myself on anyone for sex."

"Maybe not in the usual way, but you did at one time," she said.

"It could be looked at that way, but I never suggested it, even then. It was always put to me by the ladies in question. I merely accepted a bribe."

"Well, it could be looked at that way, too. Anyway, it's past history and not worth remembering."

"How it came about? True. How it was? No, I'll never forget some of those moments. Even those were memorable and worth remembering. At least, to me they were," John said.

"So, what's up? Are we about to fight the Lizzars?" she asked.

"They're busy surrounding us again. In another hour, perhaps two, they'll be working their way up the slope."

"Then I better get myself together and prepare to greet them with open arms," she said.

• • •

Wallensky shook Sergeant Martine as she lay asleep on her bed. "Come on, Isabelle, I mean, Sergeant Martine! Time to get up!"

Martine opened her eyes and stared into the face of her close friend, Kristi. "Are we under attack? I don't hear anything."

"No, not yet. They're still forming up outside the hill. You'll never believe what happened last night on guard."

Martine asked, "What happened? Did you make it with a centaur?"

"No, though I was tempted. The colonel came by to inspect. He didn't say a word about me being naked. He chatted for a moment, then left as if it didn't matter. How about that?"

"Oh shit! I'll probably hear about it today for sure. I knew I should have said something about you getting dressed before I posted you on guard. I didn't think he'd still be up checking," Martine said.

"Bet you he doesn't."

"No thanks. I don't want to bet against myself," Martine replied.

"Well, anyway, it's time to get up now. Did you get breakfast?"

Martine answered, "Yes, I got breakfast before I turned in to catch up on my sleep. I didn't know being a sergeant was so much work. I better find my bra so I can dress."

"You mean you don't remember? You weren't even wearing it when you posted me on guard. The colonel noticed you go by his office without it. He mentioned you were working so hard that he figured you didn't even know you forgot it."

"Oh god! I posted you without my bra on? He saw me out of uniform? Now I'm really in deep shit!"

Kristi said, "I don't think you're in trouble over that, either."

Isabelle found her bra and slipped into it quickly before she picked up her crossbow and left her room with Kristi beside her.

• • •

Colonel Smith said, "Okay, find a seat and let's get down to business. We want to hold off the Lizzars today while we prepare some surprises for

them. Plan on leaving tomorrow. Now, starting with last night, I was impressed by the alertness of all our guards. I made several inspections and found nothing wrong. They were all properly alert and not one of them permitted me to slip up on them. I'd like to see equivalent performance tonight. Now on to other...Is there a problem, Sergeant Martine?"

"Sir? You found nothing wrong?" she asked.

"I think that's what I said. Oh, I know what you're concerned about. You must have heard that you were seen braless last night. You looked beat, too. However, I meant what I said yesterday. I'm not going to turn a molehill into a mountain. Excuse me, that's a poor choice of words on my part. Before you say anything, I'm not implying that you have molehills. Any fool with one eye can see that they're not. What I'm trying to say is that some things aren't worth making a federal case out of. If you're doing your duty, then the less important things can be overlooked. I'm sorry, I just did it again. I don't mean to imply that your breasts are unimportant," Smith said.

Major Evan said, "Sir, I think she understands."

Mark said, "Quite so. I think I better move on before I make anymore blunders in my speech. Are you satisfied, Sergeant Martine?"

"Uh, yes sir," she answered.

"Good. Be sure to inform all your personnel that the area we're digging out is going to be booby trapped. Only a few people will know how to disarm any part of the whole lot. That way, if anyone is captured and brought back here, they're only signing their own death warrant if they point out the site to the Lizzars. While that's being done, the rest of our activities will continue as yesterday with the same basic assignments even if the Lizzars attack," Smith said.

"I do expect them to attack this morning. When they do, we'll hold them off from inside the buildings and APC's. We now have close to four hundred additional centaurs here with us, so the Lizzars aren't going to break in easily, if at all. So far as I know, every doorway and window of every building is covered by more than one centaur or person. There isn't any direction the Lizzars can approach that we can't pour out enough firepower on them to turn them back eventually. Even if we don't turn them back, we're still planning on leaving tomorrow. It just means that we'll have to do so under fire."

"Now I have some much more pleasant chores to perform. The following sergeants are now lieutenants: Lott, Pullen, Matorsky, Boggs, and Grim. If you haven't heard, Lieutenant Pullen died last night of his wounds after I

decided to promote him. We also have some new personnel, two of whom will be sergeants. They are Jim Drake and Pete Lion. Consequently, we'll reorganize into four platoons of twenty-five soldiers each. Your assignments are as follows: Sergeant Martine, Headquarters Platoon, Sergeant Drake will be in charge of First Platoon, Sergeant Lion, Second Platoon, and Sergeant Moon gets the third platoon."

"For the time being, the personnel of Headquarters Platoon will carry firearms and heavy weapons in addition to their crossbows. They will be responsible for wiping out lasers as well as being our reserves. If things go bad for us out in the field, it will be the responsibility of the Headquarters Platoon to change the tide dramatically. Headquarters Platoon will be responsible for setting up the two mortars we take with us as a precaution against us being outflanked. Of course, I'll be with the Headquarters Platoon, so it will also be your responsibility to keep me alive since this campaign relies heavily on my knowledge."

"Our allies have agreed to augment the cohort that carries us with additional warriors to carry the extra weapons and ammunition. However, because most of the women are lighter, the heavier and stronger centaurs will be carrying the other platoons. Sub-commander Frea and the other centaur commanders will be arranging transfers of some of their personnel to match what's needed for the campaign, so you won't have to worry about this until later. Yes, all the women will be in your platoon, Sergeant Martine. That is strictly for tactical advantage and not for any other reasons. There will only be a few men in your platoon besides having me around most of the time. One of those men will be a bugler. We can't rely on having radios for very long in the field as we'll have no way to keep their batteries charged. In effect, we're all regressing back to how the military once operated to communicate. After we reach the base camp, we'll begin semaphore training as well as learning bugle calls, among other things."

"Now that I've outlined some of what's in store, let's all get to work. Sergeant Martine, select one of your team to handle that chore. I want you beside me today so you can get a feel for how I operate. Before you go, I need a recommendation from you for a corporal. After which, I'll see you back here in, say, ten minutes?"

Sergeant Martine replied, "Yes sir."

• • •

Wallensky looked at Sergeant Martine as she approached. Kristi asked,

"Well?"

"Go leave your panties with Miss Wade to have your corporal stripes sewn on. While that's being done, get busy leading the detail to gather material for Lieutenant Grim. I have to be with the colonel for the rest of the day to learn how he operates."

"You're kidding? I'm a corporal?"

"Yes, and it's your chance to run around half-naked in the daylight for part of the day. Congratulations, Kristi. I wasn't sure he was going to approve of my recommendation."

"You put me in for this? Why, you bitch!" Kristi exclaimed.

"Well, I needed someone for company while I'm a non-com. Apparently you did well the other day. Lieutenant Grim backed up my recommendation. You were a shoo-in, slut-sister," Isabelle responded.

Kristi asked, "Did the colonel say anything about us being naked?"

"He said he noticed I forgot my bra, but figured from how I looked that it didn't matter. He was more concerned that I was doing my job. He didn't even mention that you were completely naked. All he said was that every guard he inspected was alert and that he couldn't sneak up on anyone. He was impressed with everyone on guard because of that."

"Well, see? I told you he didn't seem to mind."

"You were right. Now you're a corporal and you're running late. Get going. I'll see and speak to you later," Isabelle replied.

Kristi slipped out of her panties and gathered the rest of her panties into a bundle before running out of the room to drop those off with Miss Wade.

• • •

Colonel Smith looked at Sergeant Martine, then nodded. "I wasn't sure if you'd report back without your bra. You still looked beat this morning."

She said, "It was more work than I knew it would be. However, I'm ready to learn whatever is expected. Did you want me to go without my bra?"

"No, it was merely my way of trying to break the ice between us. You were also worried about the woman who was naked last night on guard, weren't you?"

"I was. I didn't even realize that I put her on her post without any clothes," Isabelle said.

"Unimportant now. What matters is that she was at her post and alert."

"I reached that conclusion at the meeting. Especially after you promoted her to corporal. Right now, she's happily running around without any panties on, even though she was a bit pissed off that I recommended her."

"It's difficult to keep any friends when you're a leader. It's even worse when combat is involved since friends often get killed. For the most part today, just follow me and listen to everything that goes on. Some of it won't make sense until later. Then later on it will click into place as if a light suddenly came on. After that, you'll be a force to be reckoned with. If we see your new corporal, remind her to draw a sidearm from the armory. I just remembered that I forgot to mention that earlier," Mark said.

"Yes, sir."

"Another thing, now that you're in a leadership position, you'll have to remember to use your subordinate leaders and not try to do everything yourself. Give them a chance to stretch and grow. That's part of what we're doing right now. When we're alone, I'll explain some more matters to you so you'll understand what's going on with how I'm organizing everything. Some of it might not be in accordance with United States law, but we're not in the United States any longer. That's a fact that has been pointed out to me more than once by John Weaver."

"By the way, John thinks he's getting rid of his leadership role by passing it on to me. He's wrong about that. All he's doing is shedding one responsibility that he didn't even have yet. He's still responsible for handling camp defenses for the centaurs since he's very knowledgeable. He did a lot of research into past battles so he could build football plays. There is a relationship between the sport and combat. He knew that and I know that. Consequently, he's very qualified to do what he's doing. I, on the other hand, am qualified to lead the offensive. Much as I'd like to take along the other sergeants whom I promoted, they're needed more in the other sectors where they can train the centaurs. As well, it keeps all our military know-how out of one basket where it can be lost completely. If I or John are lost, one of the lieutenants will step forward and assume the mantle."

"That makes sense," Isabelle said.

"Even though you're a first year student, you have already demonstrated leadership capability. Since the Headquarters Platoon is mostly first year students, you'll still be learning while performing valuable services. I'm not talking about what's between your legs, in case you've heard about how the centaur society works. What I'm getting at is that you

really will be our reserve force. You'll organize what weapons we take to support the offensive. If things go badly, you'll probably have to mount your centaurs and lead a last ditch charge to save our asses from annihilation. If that happens, you'll be using whatever we have without regards to conservation. Saved bullets don't help a dead man or woman."

Isabelle exclaimed, "I'll lead a charge?"

"The centaurs won't permit me to enter the battle that way, so it will have to be you. They've already declared me a national treasure just as they did with John and Mike. Essentially, they'll let John and Mike do just about anything they want without question, but within limits. One of those limits is that they won't let them expose themselves to direct danger. Mike wanted to check on her friend during a battle. What happened is that a centaur restrained her and carried her over his shoulder away from the battle."

Isabelle asked, "Mike's a girl?"

"Yes, short for Michelle. She's the only person qualified to repair radios. I can't say as I blame them for naming her a treasure. Within her limits, she does whatever she wants. John does much the same only he takes it a bit more than Mike. I've learned that John's a true womanizer. He'll accept any woman who'll open her legs to him. From what I gather, quite a few have."

"Uh, yes, I accidentally walked in on him yesterday. I must say that the woman seemed to be enjoying him immensely."

"Which is partly why I'm telling you about this. If one of your women decides to take him up by offering herself to him, just let them be. Wish them well and let them screw themselves silly if that's what they want to do. We'll have to placate the centaurs somewhat in order to get what we want. That means letting some people do what they want as well, seeing as how the centaurs value their services."

Sergeant Martine asked, "What about you, sir? What are your limits other than not being allowed to lead charges?"

"Sergeant Martine, I really don't know what I want besides this opportunity to lead the offensive I've planned. Perhaps I'll turn into a womanizer like John, though I doubt it at my age. One thing for certain is that I'm nowhere as well equipped for that task as he is. However, if I should decide to ask a woman to share my bed, then just ignore it should you have to report anything to me. However, I don't think an old man like myself is likely to get anywhere near that damn lucky."

Martine asked, "What about Mike? Is she?"

"She's not a Lesbian, if that's what you're asking, but I've learned that there are a few among the women. Apparently, she likes men and isn't at all reluctant to have one when she wants. Anyway, I'm getting away from some of what the Headquarters Platoon will do. For another thing, we'll carry our flag. Even though we're not on Earth or in the United States, our American flag is distinctive and easily recognized. We'll carry it if only to help identify ourselves to any newcomers from Earth we find. It should give the newcomers some confidence in light of our appearance. As well, a number of our soldiers are still inspired by it."

"Yes sir. Mind if I ask something?"

Mark replied, "I hope you'll ask without worrying whether I mind. Go ahead and ask."

She asked, "The new women we're getting in my platoon. Are they the women who arrived with John?"

"Yes, they're the women you're getting. There might be more, but you'll definitely get those six. Much as I want them to wear clothes, they're refusing to do so. Because they know the language and how to survive in this world, I'm accepting them despite that. They'll probably be among our first choices for scouts since they're light and know what they're doing. Yes, your platoon will also provide scouts for our force."

"Actually, I was wondering if you were going to permit them to remain naked. If they're that valuable, I can understand why you're accepting them on their terms. Should I do anything if they begin to influence any of our women to go naked?"

He answered, "I think that it's probably wiser at this point and time not to cause internal conflict. If someone decides to go naked...Rather, if one of our women decides to go naked, then just let her. The men won't have that kind of luxury since they'll be hurting without their jock straps to protect them while riding on the centaurs. My only hope is that we can end this war before those wear out. Never thought I'd see a situation where the length of a war could depend on such a small detail."

Isabelle said, "Then couldn't we just say that it's a morale builder to the men to remind them partly about what they're fighting for?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. We can state that any woman who wants to wear less to improve the morale will be permitted to do so. You may pass that on to your platoon later today. However, I would like to see you and your corporal keep your panties on at least."

Isabelle said, "I can do that. I'll see to it that Corporal Wallensky does as well."

"Is she a nudist? It's my understanding that some of the women here before us were confirmed nudists."

"I don't think so, but I suspect that she's somewhat of an exhibitionist."

"Daring, huh? She could advance far if we keep that bold streak alive in her. Uh, let me think on that before you tell her. I might just permit her to put her stripes on her web belt instead. I'd hate to crush that kind of spirit in anyone if keeping it alive can benefit us later," Mark said.

"Shouldn't we have Miss Wade stop the sewing on her panties before she has to redo her work?" asked Sergeant Martine.

"Yes, go ahead and tell her to put those off until last. Find out how much later that will be. That way I'll have an idea how long I can consider this matter."

• • •

Frea shouted, "Here they come!"

Colonel Smith ran over to the nearest window and briefly studied the landscape. He observed that the Lizzar units were slowly moving forward. Though he couldn't see the front ranks, he had no reason not to believe that they were already scaling the slopes on their ladders.

A few explosions went off as some hand grenades were tossed from the third floor windows of the barracks to land just beyond the edge of the island of Earth. The explosions rocked the bottoms of the slopes, tossing Lizzars into the air and spilling some from their ladders. Colonel Smith counted each explosion as the number of grenades permitted were used up to lead the Lizzars astray as to what his force still had. He was proud of his troops for spacing those out well.

Then the Lizzars reached the top of the slope only to see the area infested with coil vines. That stopped them dead in their tracks. As they picked their way forward using their spears to clear a path, arrows flew at them cutting them down quickly. One fell on a coil vine that could still react and did so. He screamed as only a Lizzar could before dying while all over the battlefield, the word was passed quickly that the area was still alive with danger. For a while, a few more Lizzars fell to arrows. Then the assault fell apart as the rest of the enemy refused to attack across the deadly field while unable to defend themselves.

Frea shouted, "They're retreating!"

Shouts went around the compound for everyone to cease fire.

The colonel turned to find that Sergeant Martine was back already. "I'm glad you're back. I reached a decision on that other matter. You might as well go tell your platoon that the women may go nude if they choose. At least, I'll be making the centaurs a bit more happy while possibly improving the morale of the men. I don't know if this will improve the women's morale as it will the men's. You'll have to keep an eye on that and let me know when it's low. You'll also have to be ready to give me suggestions for how to improve their morale. After all, even I don't know everything and still need to learn."

Isabelle said, "Well, you're going to make one woman deliriously happy with this announcement. I'll be back shortly, sir."

• • •

Kristi slipped her bra off and tossed it up in the air while a smile graced her face.

Sergeant Martine said, "I guess the colonel is going to be surprised to see me return without my bra, too, but I hate how those feel. When you spot any other platoon members, just tell them that they have a choice of wearing a bra and panties down to nothing other than their web belt. Just make sure they understand that it is not a requirement for them to go naked. We're being allowed to do so for two reasons. One is to make the centaurs happier about our commitment. The other is to help the men's morale."

"What about our morale?" Kristi asked.

"I really don't know what's going to be done about ours beyond this bit of freedom of choice."

"That's typical, I guess. So, how do I wear my corporal stripes?" Kristi asked.

"On your web belt. Drop by to see Miss Wade later and let her take care of it. Oh, also stop by the armory and draw a sidearm. You're expected to carry one now."

Kristi said, "You ought to put your stripes on your web belt, too. Those panties aren't going to last very long while riding. It's just as wearing as riding a horse. Trust me, you'll find out I'm right. The sooner you get used to being without, the better off you'll be."

"I'll give it some thought," Isabelle replied.

"Well, if you don't believe me, ask one of the new women."

"I believe you. It's just that I'm undecided. Maybe I need to wear them

out so I'll have an excuse to be naked. Okay?"

"Okay, Sarge."

• • •

"Looks like they're not going to attack anymore today," John said.

Freya said, "Not likely. They'll let the sun dry out and kill most of the coil vines that fail to take root. They might attack tonight or wait until tomorrow just to be sure."

"Well, it's just the break we needed to finish up here," John said.

Freya asked, "Have you been given a jock strap yet?"

"Yes, but I'm not wearing it until it's necessary. It's amazing how one can get used to being a certain way and not want to change. I used to swim in the buff, but that was about all. I rather enjoyed it because it was sensual and helped me release stress. Now I just enjoy being naked and not bothering with minor decisions such as what color or style I'm going to wear."

"I hope they gave you a large one since you have so much more than most of the men."

"The jock straps stretch. I should be okay, I believe."

Freya said, "You'll probably appear strange to me wearing something. I hope I get to see you in your jock strap."

"I'll make it a point to model it for you," John said.

• • •

Mark wasn't at all surprised when he saw Sergeant Martine walking toward him without her bra on. Nor did he avert his eyes. He'd stated that any woman doing so would be seen as doing it for the men's morale. That implied she was granting permission to look.

"Thought I might as well air my molehills."

"You're not going to let me forget that remark, are you?" he asked.

"Just thought I'd give you a ribbing this one time. Do you like my molehills?"

Mark said, "I'd have to be gay or dead to say that I don't. Since I'm neither, you may rest assured that I like them very much. Now shall we get on with the business of war so we can keep our various private parts alive?"

• • •

Kristi stopped by Miss Wade's sewing station and offered her web belt.

She stood and waited until her corporal stripes were sewn on the back and beside the clasp on the front. Then she swept it around her back and hooked it in place.

"That's all you're wearing?" Fawn asked.

"You bet. I'm not exactly dumb. Sooner or later, everything we wear is going to wear out. Long before then, I intend to be used to being naked. It sure hasn't hurt any of the women who came here with John," Kristi said.

"No, I can't say as it has. They appear to be normal otherwise," Fawn replied.

• • •

"Okay, you're going to have to instruct the women that they'll likely be riding female centaurs when we leave tomorrow. The centaurs don't like being held by their arms. Tell your women that they will probably have to hold on by grasping the female centaur's breasts and pressing their chests against the centaur's back. Doing so will not make them out to be Lesbians. Nor are any of the centaurs Lesbians that I know of," Mark said.

"We can't hold on higher or lower?" asked Isabelle.

"They prefer that you not. I'm not that much aware of how different their internal anatomy is, but they state that it feels uncomfortable to be held differently. I suspect that John knows why. When I find him later, I intend to ask him about this."

"Okay, I'll pass that on. What else, sir?"

"Just tag along and listen."

• • •

Mark nodded on hearing that John was in his temporary quarters. Without asking what John was doing, Mark went ahead to the quarters and knocked while Isabelle tagged along. When she saw the closed door, she instinctively knew what was probably going on inside. Before she could warn the colonel, John's voice could be heard telling them to enter. Mark opened the door and stared for a moment at the sight of one of the new women on her knees giving John a blow job.

"It's all right, come on in, Mark. We don't have any privacy back at camp, so you being here doesn't disturb us. We only came here to use the bed since it's a luxury we won't have later," John said.

Isabelle saw that it was a different woman. Sasha, if she remembered correctly.

Mark was about to back out when Sasha waved for him to come in while she worked on John without stopping. Mark asked, "Can you tell me why the female centaurs prefer to be held by their breasts?"

John replied, "Is that all you want to know? Well, it has to do with their maternal instincts. They don't mind someone being on them and feeling closed in on if they feel something on their breasts. Then it feels natural to have weight on their backs. Otherwise they get the feeling that they're being attacked. Then it becomes difficult for them to resist bucking you off. More than one woman has been thrown off because she forgot to hold onto the centaur's tits. We don't have that much problem with the male centaurs. They have a better grasp at resisting any feeling of being attacked. Like I said, it appears to be maternally related in nature. Is that enough of an explanation?"

"Uh, sure. We'll be sure to emphasize to the women that they have to hold on by the breasts. I'll see you later, John," Mark said.

• • •

Lieutenant Grim test fired the latest crossbow after it was assembled. He nodded at the accuracy which wasn't only because the bow was made well. He was, after so many test firings, becoming more skillful at using one. He nodded and set the crossbow aside to take another and load one of the arrows he was using as a bolt. He aimed and fired, scoring another hit in the center of his target before setting it with the other completed crossbow. Two more were handed him for testing and received his approval before he turned to his checklist and added two tick marks to it. "We're doing great! We just managed to produce fourteen during this hour. Everyone was nearly perfect."

There were a few hoots and hollers in reply while the sawing and shaping continued without stopping.

Kristi stepped into the room with only her pistol belt on. She carried an armload of lumber as did the other three women with her. Two of them were braless. It didn't take long for any of the three women to be noticed.

Lieutenant Grim asked, "Haven't they finished with your...What's going on?"

She noticed that he was staring and where. "Colonel Smith authorized all of the women to choose whether or not to wear bras and panties. I wear my rank on my pistol belt now, lieutenant."

"You're going to be naked now?" he asked, while he suddenly

experienced a noticeable erection.

"Yes sir, from now on I'll be wearing only my belt," she proudly announced.

"You realize that the men will stare at you, don't you?"

"I do. The colonel's statement included that consideration. If they want to look, we can't complain."

"Well, as long as you understand that, then carry on. You'll find we have a bunch of finished crossbows to be delivered," Ray said.

Kristi replied, "We'll see to getting them into the right hands. Are you going to be all right, sir? You look a little distressed down below."

"I'll be all right. It's nothing that I can't handle," Ray said.

"Such a waste that way," Kristi said as she and the other women collected the finished crossbows.

• • •

Seated in the Mess Hall, Colonel Smith said, "Okay, status reports please. Lieutenant Lott first."

Lott said, "We had to do a hurry up job on the cars by not cutting open all the roofs. We'll take the tools with us to finish that later. By skipping that step, we finished armoring all the cars. We had to build a complete shell for the jeep, but saved some time by using one of the freezers from the Mess Hall. It cut down on the generator load they were drawing and the freezer was nearly empty anyway. We're probably responsible for what everyone's getting tonight on their plates."

Smith asked, "Are the motorcycles loaded yet?"

"That they are," Lott replied.

Smith said, "Well done. Lieutenant Grim?"

"We managed to produce a hundred and thirty crossbows in ten hours. Some of my crew are still at work, so there's bound to be a few more finished. When we finish supper, we'll pack away our tools and prepare to evacuate tomorrow. Meanwhile, all the completed crossbows have been distributed," Grim replied.

Chapter 16

Martine went around to each of her soldiers, waking them quietly while

giving them instructions. "Get dressed if you're wearing anything. Strap your rifle and your crossbow over your back. Grab your helmet and web belt and report downstairs. We're leaving soon."

She surprised herself when she discovered she possessed the courage to walk into the men's quarters and shake them gently awake without caring whether they were naked, which many of them were. Her instructions to them were only slightly different since they had to wear their jock straps. Before she followed them down, she considered what Kristi had said to her before. Isabelle almost removed her panties but decided she still wasn't that daring, even if it might inspire the men or lift their morale. Even so, she wished she had her stripes sewn on her web belt as then she might have found the courage to strip her panties off. Instead, she checked to see that she had the rest of her panties in an unused pouch on her web belt before she hurried downstairs.

Frea said, "Ready, Martine?"

"I'm ready."

Frea knelt down and permitted Martine to climb on her back. She lifted herself up gently while feeling Sergeant Martine's hands reassuringly over her breasts.

Colonel Smith shouted from atop his mount, "First set of APC's! Forward!"

Four APC's roared to life and headed for the slope used before by one APC and the centaurs. As they moved down the incline, the Lizzars suddenly realized that something was happening.

"Cars! Forward!" Colonel Smith shouted.

Two dozen cars followed the fourth APC that dragged chains to snag any tire spikes and keep a path clear for them. After every third car, another APC pulled into the convoy to pull free any that bogged down in the mud or loose ground, even though loose boards were being thrown out the rear hatch of the fourth APC for the cars to gain traction upon.

"Centaur's! Forward!" Smith roared.

The centaurs walked slowly to the ramp where the colonel raised his hand to signal a halt. Every other pair carried men or women on them. They stopped at the top of the ramp and watched as the vehicles went into action against the Lizzars. While two APC's escorted the cars away at high speed, the rest of the APC's chased down the Lizzars with crushing results.

Colonel Smith watched until there was an opening wide enough to push a house through sideways, then ordered, "Forward!"

As the centaurs reached the plains, the pairs with riders followed after

the cars. The others formed up to charge the Lizzars one last time before they withdrew and followed along as part of the rear security.

• • •

Fawn looked at the sleeping young man who was placed in her car. His wounds appeared serious. Consequently, she took care to avoid any bumps, if she could, after reaching the bottom of the slope. He wore only his jock strap just as she wore only a bra and panties. Fawn suspected, though, that she wouldn't be permitted to wear those after awhile because of social pressure. She'd already noticed how the new women kept to themselves instead of socializing with the other women, including her. Until the day before. Then Fawn noticed that they were quite talkative to Corporal Wallensky who wore nothing other than her web belt.

The young man groaned, interrupting her thoughts. Fawn glanced over at him in time to see him open his eyes.

"Good morning, Shawn. You okay?" she said.

He answered, "Hurts like a, a...It hurts."

"I'm trying to miss all the bumps."

"Not complaining about your driving. It just hurts."

"I'd tell you to watch the scenery to take your mind off the pain but we only have two slits to see out and they're both lined up for my use in driving. Would you care to just talk? Maybe we can keep your mind busy so you can forget the pain."

"That would be nice. When I opened my eyes, I thought it was another night at first because it's so dark in here."

Fawn said, "No, it's only morning. Want some light? I'll switch on the dome light."

The young man looked at Fawn as the dome light came on a moment later. "You're the colonel's secretary."

"Yes, I am. He asked me to take care of you. You were very brave, I understand. Would you care to talk about it?"

"There's not much to tell. I was doing the same thing as everyone else at the time. Just unlucky that I ran out of ammo and had to fight with my bayonet. I was okay until two of them came at me at the same time. I blocked one, but the other one got me. I guess someone got to them before they could finish me off. Nothing more to tell. I'll have to thank whoever pulled me out of there."

Fawn glanced over at the young man. She didn't like seeing how pale he

was under the dome light. "Don't you have anything you'd like to talk about?"

"I don't know," he answered while continuing to stare at her.

Fawn felt self-conscious about him looking at her. "Are you going to settle down and marry after we reach the centaur camp?"

"I don't have a girlfriend. I really don't know any girls. Can we talk about something else?"

"Sure. Am I making you uncomfortable?"

"In what way?" he asked.

"Sitting here in my underwear. Does that make you feel uncomfortable?"

"Not really. I thought I'd die of old age someday in my bed. Never thought death would come for me this soon."

"You're not going to die. You're not as seriously wounded as some others. Those they had to carry in the ambulance," she said.

"Yeah, right. More likely, they didn't have enough room to carry one more."

"Really, you're going to recover."

• • •

Sergeant Martine felt strange holding another female, even a centaur, by the breasts while her own pressed against the other's back.

Frea asked, "You doing okay back there?"

"Sure, just feels strange."

Frea said, "You'll probably feel horny soon. We've learned that many human women get horny riding on our backs. I won't be offended if you should begin to feel that way or have an orgasm."

"You're not a Lesbian, are you?"

"Well, not exactly. I know what that means so you're not confusing me. I have had some petting affairs with other females while out on missions. Usually, though, I settle for having a male mount me. They can do so much more than another female since our anatomy is much different than yours. Anyway, I only know of one human female who's tried having sex with one of our males. I don't know of any human males who've tried to mate with one of our females."

"One female? One human female mated with a male centaur?"

"Oh, she takes anyone she can get to oblige her. The humans told me that she's a nymphomaniac and can't help herself," Frea said.

"Oh, then I guess that's why she tried."

"Anyway, you don't have to worry about me wanting to fool around with you."

Isabelle asked, "You're not even curious about how it would feel?"

"I've wondered, but I don't really want to."

• • •

"Would you like for me to take off my clothes?" Fawn asked.

The young man didn't answer.

Fawn twisted one arm behind her to unsnap her bra. It loosened and slipped down her arms when she brought her arm from behind her back. She glanced over at the young man to see if he was leering at her breasts but he seemed unconcerned. Fawn let her bra slip off one arm, switched hands on the steering wheel, and let it slip off the other arm. She picked it up off her lap and dropped it between the front seats. "Well, I'm halfway there. You're not even looking at me."

"Did you want me to?"

Fawn said, "Well, if it helps you keep your mind off your pain, then I'll feel like I'm accomplishing something."

The young man smiled as he dropped his eyes to her breasts.

"Do you like what you see?" she asked.

"They're beautiful, ma'am."

"I'm Fawn. Let's get off the ma'am stuff. You're making me feel old enough to be your mother which I'm not."

"Yes ma'am, I mean, Fawn. I'm Terry."

Fawn slipped one hand down to her panties and wiggled the waist band down past her hips, then raised up in her seat momentarily while trying not to step on the gas pedal any harder. She quickly grabbed her panties with one hand and pulled those down around her thighs before settling down in the seat. She checked her speed and distance again before she shoved her panties down her legs. She eventually pulled her left foot out and left her panties hanging around her right ankle.

Terry said, "You better get them completely off. Otherwise they might snag on the gas pedal when you're trying to hit the brakes."

Fawn glanced over to see that he was looking at her foot. "Aren't you going to look at more of me than that?"

He raised his eyes to hers and replied, "Uh, sure. You really want me to?"

"Yes, I think I do. I really hoped looking at me will ease your pain

some.”

“I appreciate what you're doing. I just hope that when I die it doesn't cause you any problems with being naked.”

“You're not going to die, Terry.”

• • •

Isabelle gasped twice quickly as a small orgasm punched through her body with the next two steps Frea took. “I think I'm going to like being part of the mobile infantry. Will you be going with us?”

Freya said, “If my leg heals well, I'll be going. Most likely you and I will continue to be paired.”

Colonel Smith came alongside. “Are all of your troops present?”

Sergeant Martine turned her head to him and smiled before she answered, “All present still. I suspect most of them are in ecstasy by now.”

Smith stared at her briefly, then said, “I have a feeling I know why. Carry on, Sergeant.”

Isabelle asked, “Sir, how are the rest of the platoons doing?”

He answered, “Pretty good so far. Two falls with one broken arm. Otherwise everyone is doing well.”

Isabelle said, “I mean, are the men holding up well? I think some of us women are hornier than shit now.”

“You're looking to get laid?” he asked.

“Right now, I'd even jump your bones, sir.”

“Well, uh, thanks for the compliment, I think. Yes, as far as I can tell, our jock straps are protecting us. I guess if your women have to have a man when we arrive, I can look the other way. It's more important that we maintain unity now.”

• • •

John stopped and slid off his centaur's back before running over to the fallen man. Along with help from the centaur he fell off and John's ride, the three of them managed to put the injured man back on his centaur.

“I think I broke my leg!” the man groaned.

“Then take something to bite on and try not to scream when I check it,” John said.

The man pulled out a spare jock strap, wadded it, and placed it between his teeth. He grimaced soon when John felt of his broken leg and straightened it.

"We'll need a splint to set the leg and keep it immobile," John said.

• • •

Kristi felt her hands slipping. Her centaur quickly grabbed her by clamping her elbows down to her side to keep her from slipping back and falling.

Kristi said, "Thanks, I was about to lose everything there for a moment. How soon are we taking a rest?"

"Are you that tired?"

"I just need a break from all this action I'm getting. Now I know why some women like horses. It's every bit as good as riding a motorcycle. Maybe better."

• • •

John raced to the head of the column on his centaur. They caught up with Colonel Smith who was at the lead once more.

"You better call a rest. We've got more and more people falling now," John said.

Smith asked, "Are we far enough away from the Lizzars to chance it?"

"Plenty far. They don't have anything to keep up with us. I'd estimate that we've put ten miles between us already."

Colonel Smith raised his hand while shouting, "Company! Halt!"

• • •

Fawn heard the car horns sound and repeated the signal before gently applying her brakes. She stopped close behind another car as the convoy stopped so everyone could take a short break and stretch their legs and relieve themselves. Several APC's moved into protective positions with their machine guns at the ready. Another signal went down the line that she repeated before putting the car in park and applying the parking brake. She opened the door and hesitated about stepping outside with nothing on. She glanced over at Terry and saw an expectation in his eyes.

Summoning up her courage, she stepped out and walked away from the car before squatting to take care of business. She finished and glanced around, surprised to see that some of the others were equally naked, though just as many had on their jock straps. She noticed that the female staff from the Mess Hall were still wearing their panties, but had discarded their bras. Remembering Terry, Fawn quickly ran around the car to his side

and opened his door. "I almost forgot that you might need to relieve yourself."

"I do need to go, but I can't get out. Maybe if you go around and help twist me from inside, I can just piss out the doorway."

"Sure, I'll do that," she replied before running back around and getting inside the car.

She gently pushed against his left thigh and shoulder so as not to disturb his wounds until he was nearly facing out the door. She tried not to watch as he relieved himself.

"Thanks, you can help me shift back around," he eventually said.

She found that she had to reach inside his thigh to pull him back around. For a moment, she had to pause before grabbing her panties to wipe off part of the seat where some of his urine hadn't made it outside the car. She tossed the panties out and finished turning him in his seat before exiting the car to run around and close his door.

As she got back in the car, Terry said, "I'm just glad I don't need to take a shit now. We probably don't even have any toilet paper."

Fawn smiled and reached behind the seat to come up with a roll.

"Then why'd you use your panties to clean the seat?" he asked.

"I just grabbed what was closest. Anyway, I don't need them. I haven't really felt at all uncomfortable since taking them off while driving. Have you enjoyed looking at me?"

"You're nice to look at in full daylight. Thanks."

• • •

Sergeant Martine pulled her panties down to relieve herself only to discover that the seat was ripped through from her crotch to nearly the back waistband. She finished before she stood and waddled a few steps away with her panties around her knees. She then let them drop to the ground and stepped out of them. She almost threw them away, then remembered that her stripes were sewn onto them. Plus she wasn't sure if the material could be used for anything else. Rather than feel guilty about throwing away something that might still be used, she tucked them into the pouch on her web belt with her other underwear before walking back to remount Frea. Frea said nothing about Isabelle being naked.

Isabelle rode around to check on her other platoon members. Nearly all the women were discovering that their panties were in sad shape. Half wore only their bras with their web belts while a few were naked save for their

web belts. A few wore their panties, even if they were ripped down the center. Just about every woman had an embarrassed looking smile on her face as if caught having too much fun.

The men in her platoon seemed to be all right. One was still taking a piss when she reached him. He glanced up at her and grinned mischievously at being caught.

Isabelle said, "Everything okay?"

"Yes, uh, uh..." he said as he saw that she was naked and became aroused while still pissing.

Isabelle said, "Yeah, you look like you're okay. Horny, too. Well, play your cards right and polite when we get to camp. You just might get lucky."

"With you, uh, sergeant?"

"Probably not since we're in the same platoon. That doesn't mean you won't get lucky with someone else."

• • •

Fawn glanced over at Terry. He was sitting quite still looking at her. "Still enjoying the scenery?"

He didn't answer. She reached over and gently shook him as she asked, "You awake?"

His body felt cold to her touch. She turned her head and looked at him closer, then snapped her head back forward as she regained control of her car from turning the wheel reflexively while looking at him. She pressed the horn to signal the rest of the convoy. Then she remembered the correct signal and pressed the horn in the proper sequence.

A few moments later, the signal went down the line as cars repeated the horn signal for a stop. She stopped her car and shut off the engine before opening her door and climbing out with tears running down her cheeks.

Lieutenant Grim's APC drove over to stop beside her. He dismounted from the APC. "What's wrong?"

"Terry died, I think," Fawn cried.

Ray walked over to the car and ducked inside to check on the young man. He felt for a pulse before reaching across to unlock the passenger door. He stepped back away from the car and went around to the passenger side to check on Terry. After unbuckling the man's seat belt, he leaned Terry's body forward to discover that Terry's back wound had reopened. Ray buckled the young man back into place, then closed the door. He went back

around the car to speak with Miss Wade.

Ray said, "You better climb into the APC. I'll drive the car. You want your clothes first?"

"No, I'll be all right without them for now. I was letting him look at me to ease his pain. I didn't believe he was dying. Now I'm glad I stripped for him. At least, he went peacefully."

Ray replied, "Come on, we can't hold up the convoy much longer. Climb up into the APC so we can get going."

Fawn climbed up the APC side with Ray's assistance. She didn't even notice that he had to place one hand under her ass to keep her from falling before she reached the top and climbed inside. Ray climbed up for a moment. "I'm going to drive up to the head of the column. Watch for my signals. If the enemy shows his face, you're to keep out of it and let the other APC's handle them. Make sure she buttons up the hatch."

• • •

The convoy pulled into the new base camp after six more hours of driving. Ray drove away from the other vehicles and carefully removed Terry's body with help from some centaurs.

"Will there be a service?"

Ray answered, "Yes, but after we all rest a bit. We're still getting ourselves oriented."

"We understand. Were there many casualties getting out?"

Ray said, "I only know of this one man dying. We're stretched out in different places. I guess the last groups will arrive tonight."

The ambulance pulled up behind Ray's car and stopped. One of the ambulance attendants stepped out. He went to the back and pulled out a stretcher without saying a word. He lifted another young man's body from the stretcher and carried it over to where Terry's body lay.

Ray bent down and removed the jock strap from the dead man before walking away back to the car.

• • •

Isabelle noticed during the second rest stop that all of her women were naked whether they wanted to be or not. She checked with each woman to make sure that she kept her bra and torn panties before moving on to the next woman.

The men still wore their jock straps though only a few were noticeably

aroused by the sight of so much naked female flesh around them. Isabelle could tell by looking at the bulges as to the approximate size of each member's member. A few actually caused her to feel some desire, though not because of size, while she smiled at their owners before moving on to check on another platoon member. She felt sure that some of the men would definitely get lucky after they arrived at the camp, provided they weren't all too tired from riding all day. Already, she could tell that most of her platoon were happy to be standing and stretching their legs.

Colonel Smith rode by slowly. "Any problems, Sergeant?"

Martine answered, "Nothing that we can't handle. Our panties fell apart from this much riding. Don't plan on any of us wearing anything when we go on the offensive."

"So I noticed. You and I will have to discuss this later. Now isn't a good time. Any injuries among your people?"

She answered, "None yet. A couple of close calls, but no one's fallen."

"Okay, well, we're about twenty miles from where we started. We're going to take it a bit slower now that we're far ahead of any pursuit. We've had too many people fall and injure themselves, so we'll have to go a bit easier for their benefit. After our next stop, we'll walk to give the centaurs a break. They haven't complained but John tells me that they're not used to carrying heavy loads over long distances. Keep your platoon together and continue to keep up the good work. I'm proud of you all."

Isabelle went around the extra centaurs assigned to her platoon so she could check on their loads. Two of them were pulling the cannon. Others carried mortars or ammo.

Chapter 17

Sergeant Martine noticed that the colonel said nothing when they dismounted and several of the men followed John's example in removing his jock strap to walk about openly without anything on. For the same reason, she said nothing when two of her men did the same. Instead, she formed her platoon into two columns as she had seen the sergeants do before at the academy. She then walked alongside where she could move freely and keep an eye on her platoon. The centaurs formed into two columns as well and followed her platoon.

Colonel Smith shouted, "Forward! March!"

She repeated his commands and wondered if they should get into step with each other. For the most part, she could see that her platoon members were already keeping in step with each other so they didn't trip or stumble into each other. Even so, some tended to bunch up. She glanced back along the long columns, noticing that five people were still mounted. It took her a moment before she realized they were injured and probably couldn't walk.

The columns moved far slower than anytime earlier as they were limited to walking speed. Isabelle wondered if they'd reach the camp before dark or sometime the next day. It was a few more moments before she realized that it didn't really matter when they reached the camp. They had nowhere to go and nothing to do except survive. With that in mind, she moved about the length of her platoon keeping her ears open for any grumbling, hoping that she could say the right thing to make that person glad to just be alive.

• • •

"How are you holding up, colonel?" John asked.

"I'm fine. I keep in shape."

"Maybe so, but how long do you wear a jock strap normally?"

Mark asked, "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just because I was a coach. I know how they can become a problem themselves if you wear them longer than necessary. You have any chaffing yet between your legs? If you do, then you can be sure that most of your men do."

Mark stopped and looked at John. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Unless you've got some petroleum jelly to pass around, you're going to have a bunch of hurting men soon. That's what athletes use to keep from getting rubbed raw when they train all day."

Smith shouted, "Company! Halt!"

Isabelle repeated the commands after almost being surprised since she hadn't expected a halt so soon. She stood beside her platoon until the colonel called for all platoon sergeants to report to him. She ran forward and stopped beside him while he waited for the rest of the platoon sergeants to arrive.

"I just learned something that requires immediate action. Inform all of your men who are walking to remove their jock straps and put those away until we mount up later. I don't want any of them to rub their legs so raw

that they can't walk or ride later. I don't care if they like this order or not. It's for their well being. If any of your men give you problems, report it to me. See to this immediately. Then raise your hands when your unit is ready to resume marching," Smith said.

Isabelle ran back the short distance to her platoon and stopped near where her men were congregated. "The colonel has just ordered that all men remove their jock straps until we ride centaurs again. He's been advised that walking in them too long can cause severe chaffing injuries."

Isabelle turned and resumed her position beside her platoon and raised her hand. She looked back along the column and saw that she was first as she expected to be since her platoon had so few men. She noticed, too, that most of her women were glancing back at the few naked men in the platoon.

Sergeant Martine said, "Ladies, let's remember that the men are not on display for our enjoyment. Give them some consideration."

"But Sarge! Some of us had no choice about getting naked. They're allowed to look at us!"

Martine said, "Okay, but don't lose control over yourselves or trip everyone trying to get a look. Let's remember that our first priority is to reach the camp."

Colonel Smith hollered, "Company! Forward march!"

"Platoon! Forward march!" Martine said. She let most of the platoon move ahead of her so she could keep a close watch from the side on some of the women.

• • •

"We're not going to make camp by tonight, even if we ride the rest of the way which I don't recommend," John said.

"Then we should camp out here?" asked Mark.

"I believe we should. About the only thing that might threaten us are some nasty looking cats. We have weapons that can deal with those," John said.

"Looks like this isn't any different from what's ahead or was behind for the last twenty miles," Mark said.

"It isn't going to be any different until we reach the forest. Then things will change drastically. We'll be walking straight through the jaws of death. You'll want to caution your troops not to stray one inch off the path. It's better anyway, that we tackle the forest while we're fresh instead of tired

like now.”

The colonel asked, “Should the men put their jock straps on tonight?”

“I'd leave it up to them. I'm not wearing mine until we ride again. I'll admit that it does provide enough support then that I'm not hurting myself whenever I bounce down. At least, the right parts are out of the way.”

“I think when we leave on the offensive, I'll instruct the men to only take one spare with them. We'll leave the rest behind for other men to use.”

“Yes, I guess that's a good idea. If we have to evacuate some area quickly, most of the men will appreciate arriving with their balls intact,” John replied.

“It would be both nice and bad if we had some more men. I'm not wishing this world on anyone else from Earth, but it appears that there will be sooner or later since you didn't find the tractor beam that brought us here.”

“Perhaps your offensive force will find it for us. What would be nicest would be for us to have a US Army tank division snagged. Then the Lizzars would find out what real technology is about,” John said.

“Well, even if we get tanks, they're not going to be much good when they run out of fuel,” Mark said.

“True, but even if we only sent out a few of them so we could keep them in fuel for as long as possible, they'd have an impact that the Lizzars couldn't counter.”

“That might work, but we might as well wish for an Air Force base with jets while we're wishing,” Mark said.

“Yeah, that would give them Lizzars something to worry about. I can just imagine a jet strafing them with mini-guns blazing away and drilling right through their armor chest plates. I'd love to see that,” John remarked.

“Do you think my cavalry idea will work?”

“I think that you're the right man to pull it off. It might take a year or two and several campaigns before they beg for peace, but I think it's worth trying,” John answered.

“I hope I'm right about this. After all, I'm planning on taking only a hundred men and women and a thousand centaurs deep into Lizzar territory to challenge them offensively. They'll probably mass twenty-thousand troops against us easily.”

“You'll just have to hit them in true cavalry style. Hit and run. Then hit and run again. I've already laid some groundwork for you in convincing the centaurs that you don't have to win every battle.”

"I'm glad you have. I'd hate to think that they might be unwilling to break off an engagement and get us slaughtered."

• • •

Isabelle pulled out her sheet of paper with the names of her platoon members. She scanned down it and selected the next individuals for guard duty before seeking them out and posting them to the camp perimeter along with some of the centaurs.

Though she saw a few women and men pull something back on around their bottoms, she didn't see any reason to bother and continued to go about her duties while still naked. For the most part, she was glad that there wasn't much going on inside the camp as the majority of personnel appeared tired. Isabelle hoped that things didn't fall apart too badly or she'd find herself facing, along with the colonel and a few non-coms, what could become an ugly situation.

• • •

Isabelle woke when the horrible scream penetrated the night air. She heard voices shouting from the perimeter as she groped for her weapons before rushing to where the action was.

She reached the edge to see some of her guards and several centaurs facing what was the biggest and ugliest cat she'd ever seen. Already, it had several arrows sticking out of its body yet it was still aggressive. To Isabelle's eyes, it didn't appear to be inclined to leave. She leveled her crossbow and fired straight at the cat's face while another arrow flew at it from a centaur.

The cat screamed hideously once more before three more arrows dropped it to the ground with a thud as its great weight hit.

Isabelle shuddered before thinking about her people. "Anyone hurt? Is everyone okay?"

One woman stood and pissed down her legs. Similarly, one of the men was unable to control his bowels. Both trembled at having been so close to death.

Frea came over and said, "We'll drag the carcass away from camp for other predators to feast on. Hopefully they'll be satisfied with one of their own. Pass the word on not to shoot when my warriors return."

Isabelle nodded, then went to her guards to inform them of the situation. She didn't realize until she got back to where she bedded down

earlier that she was also shaking from fighting the huge beast.

• • •

The morning came, though it was hardly noticeable since the three moons reflected more than enough light to read by during the night. Only the shadows became stronger while the air became much warmer quickly. Colonel Smith spoke with his XO and non-coms briefly.

"Okay, tell the men to put their jock straps back on. Make sure everyone gathers all their gear and have them mount up. We'll ride until we reach the forest. Emphasize to your people that they're not to wander off the path or touch any of the hanging coil vines once we reach the forest. They're just as deadly as those on the ground, even if they only touch so much as a finger. The only way to stop them if they get only a finger is to amputate the hand. Remind them, over and over again if necessary, that the coil vines are deadly and no horseplay is to be tolerated. Everyone clear on this matter?"

Isabelle and the others nodded.

"Okay, to your posts. We'll leave in five minutes," the colonel said while stepping into his jock strap.

Isabelle rushed back to her platoon. As soon as she reached it, she said, "You men, get your straps back on. Everyone gather your gear together and mount up! We're leaving in four minutes!"

• • •

Isabelle gazed at the forest with deep dread. It appeared every bit as dark and deadly as it was said to be. The columns came to a halt. Immediately, she ordered, "Dismount! Men, remove your straps. Form up in two columns and stay on the path!"

Soon after, the reformed columns moved toward the woods. Isabelle stifled a shivering shudder through her body as she reached the edge and saw the coil vines hanging off to the sides and high overhead. She hoped that none fell on any of her people or anyone for that matter. She didn't want to see anyone die without any hope of being helped.

Even worse, she discovered that they were walking much slower as several centaurs led the way and made sure the path was clear. As they moved deeper into the forest, she couldn't help but see some skeletons from time to time. Some of them were once centaurs and more shivers went up and down her spine as she thought of how horrible it must have been for

them to know that they were dying while their friends watched helplessly.

• • •

Colonel Smith remarked to John, "It's too bad we can't come up with a way to cultivate those into a defensive position or even to figure out how to use them offensively. They sure scared the shit out of the Lizzars."

"They scare the shit out of me, too, Mark."

"You should think about how those can be used. Then find out if anything we brought or that you already have can be used to stun those things long enough to transport and use later," Mark said.

"I'll give it some thought, but I won't hold my breath waiting for a solution," John said.

"That's mostly what I'm asking. Just give it some thought. Maybe we can try some of your thoughts out later. It's just too good a weapon to not possess."

"Just hope that your force doesn't get caught out in one of those storms."

"We'll still have our tents. Hopefully, we'll have enough warning to put those up in time and take shelter so the centaurs can seek safety at their top speed. I think that's our best hope for overall survival if we encounter a storm."

"I wish you luck then. You'll need it."

• • •

Isabelle was grateful to see the sun shining overhead at last without any coil vines or poisonous leaves blocking it. She and others learned more than enough about the forest they passed through to give them a healthy respect for it, not that it was all bad.

There were other things pointed out that were good to eat that she and others made a point of trying when some was offered. One fruit wasn't as good as chocolate, but it was a close enough substitute for the taste. She could understand then why the centaurs and wildlife dared venture into the forest at all. Of course, it wasn't the only thing they sampled, but it was the one she most remembered later.

Coming out of the forest, Colonel Smith stood and watched as everyone passed by. "We're walking the rest of the way to camp. It's not very far now. We'll be there before supper."

• • •

On entering the camp, Isabelle was struck by the shameless display of nudity among all the women and few men already there. Only a few men, notably from the academy wore anything at all. She was, however, a bit disappointed to see Lieutenant Grim wearing his jock strap as she hoped to compare him to John. Then she heard Colonel Smith calling a meeting and ran toward him to report.

• • •

"Okay, we did fairly well on our evacuation. We had three wounded men die along the way. I understand that the centaurs fared well, though they lost a few warriors in their skirmish as we left. I've already expressed my sympathies to them over their loss," Smith said.

"While we're here, we're fairly safe from attack. We have a large forest between us and the Lizzars. They have been known to go through it, especially if they can find a gap, but even they know that it's not easy or safe so they don't do it very often. As far as the enemy circling around, you may tell your people that they can relax while in camp as the centaurs keep a wide patrol out constantly to spot enemy activity. Since they can range farther than ourselves while on foot, we'll take this opportunity to rest and prepare for the offensive. While we're in camp, uniform requirements will be very loose so long as your web belt and weapons are near enough to be reached quickly in case of an attack. You may tell your men and women that they may wander around as naked as jaybirds if they like."

"While we're talking about how loose we'll be here, you've probably noticed by now that some of the other people before us think nothing of making out in the open where they can be seen. I'm also aware that they don't have much choice since there isn't any place private for them. Even though it's not good military discipline, I see no choice but to allow our personnel to behave in a like manner while we're here so we can discourage desertion. I don't want our force to melt away and disappear because we don't allow any freedom while we talk about fighting to preserve freedom. These aren't all my thoughts. I had some interesting conversations with John along the way. He managed to put together a force composed of untrained civilians and hold out for days because he let his people enjoy the freedoms they were fighting for. The way I see it, we can possibly attract some of those people to join us for the offensive if we follow the same strategy John used in keeping his force together. Anyway, it's not unprecedented for a military force to behave in this manner. A number of

ancient armies behaved exactly this way. Apparently, only modern armies are so rigid and different.”

“Anyway, give your people enough leeway to enjoy some freedom while keeping them on our side. We have to have their cooperation in order to win. We simply can't execute someone without good reason, so punishment will be light or non-existent for most problems. If you have two members argue, just separate them until they cool off. If they're fighting, let them wear themselves out so long as they don't try to kill each other. I don't want to scare anyone away by announcing a list of crimes and punishments, so we'll have to play this mostly by ear.”

“Above all, keep yourselves out of arguments when possible. I want the men and women to follow you because they respect you and not out of fear. I think we can succeed if we tackle the problem in this manner.”

“We'll have a daily meeting at breakfast. That's when we'll discuss ideas and progress on our preparations. We can't leave until we have our forces gathered and trained. My estimate for that is a minimum of one month before we leave. The bad thing about that is the Lizzars will have probably brought in several more pieces of Earth by then. If they do, we might succeed at recruiting from among the newcomers if we show ourselves to be fair, lenient, and open while respecting their space as we'll try to do the same for the people here before us and ourselves. If the scouts should spot the tractor beam site, we'll go out with whatever force is available, whether our other preparations are complete or not. The tractor beam site has to be destroyed...” Colonel Smith looked at the surprised faces of some of his non-coms. “I knew that might be a surprise to some of you, but there isn't any chance of going home for us or anyone else. None of us know how to operate the tractor beam should we capture it intact. We already know that the Lizzars will not send us home. Some of John's people tried that. They wound up as slaves after one of them was killed and the women with them were raped by the Lizzars. You should tell your personnel the truth that we can't go home. You might want to sugar coat it but I don't suggest trying to hide it from them. They have a right to know that this is now home. We're simply not going to see much improvement in our conditions for awhile.”

“If someone indicates a desire to desert or leave, make it clear to them that we're not going to chase them down. We simply don't have the resources to chase after them so they can have a proper burial. Just remind them of what we've already faced and that unity is our only hope of survival.”

"Starting tomorrow most of the APC's will be moving to other sectors along with some of our personnel and some of the civilians. We're spreading ourselves out so we can't be wiped out in one strike by the Lizzars. They fear us and rightly so. When we begin our offensive, we'll drive that point home to them in a way they'll never forget. For today, just let everyone rest and meet with the old timers. Tomorrow, we'll see some of our people leave and begin our work assignments. That's all for today."

• • •

Isabelle walked around the camp after giving her platoon the good, bad, and worst news. She left a number of them crying and consoled a few of them before they composed themselves. She still felt shocked to learn that she'd live her life out naked on a strange world in what might be a war so long that it would extend past her lifetime, but managed to hide her own feelings..

She wasn't sure what she was seeking when she spotted Miss Wade with her legs spread open for a man to take her. Intrigued, she watched as he went down on her and made love in plain sight of everyone. Only a few others from the academy really paid any attention, Isabelle noticed. The old timers seemed not to care, though a few of them were doing likewise at various locations throughout the large encampment.

Some members of her platoon and other platoons were at the river where they bathed or swam. Isabelle left Miss Wade to her enjoyment as she wandered over to the river where she stripped off her web belt and weapons before jumping in to enjoy the water.

Kristi swam over, "I noticed that you remained naked. Any particular reason?"

"Not really. It's just that I've finally concluded that it doesn't matter. We're still civilized humans whether we're dressed or not. Anyway, having one pair of panties wear out in less than a day was probably what convinced me that it's futile trying to stay dressed."

Kristi asked, "Seeking any action yet?"

"Sex?" asked Isabelle.

"What other kind of action is there around here?"

"I've noticed that it happens. I'm not sure if that's what I want now. Admittedly, I was hornier than shit the last two days. I think I'm over that now."

Kristi said, "Well, I'm going to go ask John. I've heard that he usually

doesn't turn down any offers."

"I hope you enjoy him, then." Isabelle wandered over to where the APC's were being unloaded by dozens of centaurs eager to use some of the weapons or make more with some of the materials or tools. She spotted where someone painted a name on one to read "Grim's Reaper." She knew then that Lieutenant Grim would be leaving in it the next day. She stood around to wait for him so she could thank him for watching out for her and the others.

"Sergeant Martine, you're slightly out of uniform, aren't you?" Ray asked as he came upon Isabelle waiting beside his APC.

"I have to get my stripes sewn onto my web belt since the panties didn't hold up. Miss Wade was busy or I would have gotten it done by now."

"Well, I don't think you'll get her to do it today. She's still busy and doesn't look like she's going to slow down anytime soon."

Isabelle said, "I never figured her to do all that."

"Her passenger died along the way. It really tore her up. I think she's determined to see that every man knows how much she appreciates them fighting for our freedom and lives. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's the impression I got. What brings you here?"

Isabelle said, "Well, lieutenant, I wanted to thank you for recommending me for sergeant. It's been an eye-opener to say the least. I've never worked so hard as I have since becoming a sergeant."

"Then don't thank me. The job only gets harder and you'll be questioning yourself all the time."

"Not just for that. I also want to thank you for being a good sergeant while we were still an academy on Earth. I now know part of what you went through when we girls walked around in nothing sometimes while you ignored any desires you might have felt while teaching us. You had a largely thankless job. That's why I'm here."

"Truthfully, I didn't think most of you could cut it. You proved me wrong. I held myself off so I wouldn't be the cause of any of you failing to complete your first year," Ray said.

"Then you did desire us?" she asked.

"More than once is all I'll admit to."

She said, "Your APC?"

"Yes, it is. Someone painted that name on it. I liked it, so I didn't see any reason to get upset."

"No, I'm asking if you'd like to have me inside your APC. I'm offering myself to you."

"You're offering me your body?"

"Yes. Now will you go inside with me and take off that strap or do I have to lose my virginity in the open?"

"If the colonel hadn't suspended most of the rules, I'd be suspicious of your motives. However, if you want to do this, then I'm not going to disappoint you. I'm going to a far off sector and you're leaving in a month for enemy territory. We might never see each other again after tomorrow morning."

"All the more reason to do this now and tonight, too." She took his hand and led him inside the nearly empty APC.

"Do you know what you're about to do?"

"I just lie here."

"Wrong. It's not an easy or clean experience. If you feel like meeting me halfway as I shove myself in, then try to synchronize yourself so we don't come apart. Otherwise we'll both get a jolt that doesn't feel good. I guess your being a virgin is why you wanted some privacy."

"It is. I really didn't want to let anyone know that I was already a sergeant and wasn't experienced yet. I'm ready."

• • •

Colonel Smith paced before his officers and non-coms without stepping on the crude map drawn in the dirt. Occasionally, he pointed at features with his saber. "Okay, that's where just about everyone will be. If anyone gets separated from the main body and is unable to find us, we have a wide area to head for. The sectors will be keeping a close watch for anyone who becomes separated. See that all your troops know where to head in case that happens. Make sure they know not to let the Lizzars get hold of anything valuable. I'd rather they destroyed it than hurt everyone by letting the Lizzars use any of it against us."

"Sergeants, see to it that your personnel spend an hour each day at target practice with their crossbows. They don't have to hit small targets. Just what they can expect to encounter realistically. Make sure they keep their weapons clean and encourage them to also practice spear throwing and using swords. They could get into a situation where that's all there is at hand to fight with. I'd like them to become accomplished with those other weapons instead of relying on their rifles."

"When the centaur cohorts arrive, we'll begin practicing for real. Then we'll spend an hour a day shooting arrows while mounted and another hour

while dismounted. We'll also practice doing cavalry charges during the day. This is going to be real training for real battles. Impress that on your personnel. Their lives and ours will depend on everyone doing their best."

"Until they arrive, we'll also lend a hand in constructing various weapons to take with us into the field. For one thing, we're only taking two mortars with us. The rest will be spread out among the sectors with the APC's. One of our construction projects is to construct portable bases to mount our mortars on so they can be transported ready to use even while we're mounted. We're working on the design so one person can ride with the mortar to load and fire it. One of the centaurs will carry another person who'll hand off the ammunition as it's needed."

"As far as the cannon is concerned, I'll train some of the centaurs to pull and operate it. Hopefully we can modify the blank rounds or construct some sort of explosive shell to fire from it. If not, then we'll use it like the day we arrived with gravel for grapeshot. Only we'll probably collect rocks along the way to use instead. I think the cannon ought to be capable of stopping a charge dead in its tracks. Those are our only heavy weapons for now. We'll build some others using plans we brought along from the academy museum. Thank goodness, the ancient Romans possessed some heavy weapons that we can easily replicate."

"I'm planning on using women mostly to operate the heavy weapons. On Earth, I'd be called a sexist pig for that. However, we'll be falling back on old weapons such as lances that require chest and arm strength. Sergeant Martine, I've had a few offers from some more women to join the cause. Apparently some of them have already tasted Lizzar slavery and they're quite eager to fight back. I will accept them with no questions asked, so your platoon could easily become all female. However, I am not trying to segregate your platoon from the men. In fact, I will not attempt to keep them from mingling at night unless they're on guard. Advise your women to do their best to avoid pregnancy since I plan on us spending up to six months on our first campaign unless everything falls apart. Uh, quite frankly Sergeant Martine, that means they should try to limit their types of sexual activity to those that don't cause pregnancy, but I won't punish them for going beyond that. I understand too fully that they're all mostly young and have raging hormones."

"Even though you'll be our reserves, your platoon will also practice doing charges with the rest of the platoons. If our forces get into trouble, I will not hesitate in ordering you to lead your platoon into close combat so we can extricate ourselves. If that happens, you'll have the luxury of having

your rifles along to augment your strength. I brought along the training records and we'll go over them to designate some snipers for special assignments. As I may have stated before, you'll also provide scouts for the entire force. The scouts will be old timers as everyone is calling the people here longer than us since they already know the language, conditions, wildlife, and terrain. They'll report directly to me on returning from missions. Then they'll be under your command again."

"You'll find your assignments on a list Miss Wade put together. Gentlemen..."

"It seems like we're asking a lot from so few of us, sir," Sergeant Moon stated.

"Appearances can be deceiving. Remember that Pizarro and Cortes each conquered an entire empire with fewer resources and personnel than we have. We are no less capable. You have your assignments. This briefing is over," Colonel Smith said.

The End

Version 1.1 Changes

- Added a table of contents with links to chapters.
- Changed chapter headings into h3 elements.
- Added title, author, and version number.
- Added some basic CSS.
- Added nicebook link elements and 'mainbody' div wrapper.
- Changed ".9mm handgun" to "9mm handgun".
- Change "the end" to "The End" and removed curly braces from around it.
- Changed "dumb" quotation marks (ASCII decimal 34 and 39) to "smart" (real) quotation marks.
- Added three missing quotation marks.
- Added this "Changes" section.
- Changed "2" to "#2" in the title element.
- Added "[Warning: Contains Sexual Situations]" near the beginning.
- Added the author's real name (David L. Kuzminski).