

# Telbathia

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*the second in a series of novellas concerning Marinia, Zhinari, Koji, and Matt.*

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**Chapter 1 - Telbathia**

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# 1 - Telbathia

Troubles of Telbathia

1:Ramniesh

Koji stood awestruck, gazing at the trees towering around him. Never before had he seen such trees; these were huge- at least 12 times the size of any common tree. Ramniesh 3 was certainly nothing like any other planet he had ever visited before. The soil and atmosphere formed the perfect eco-system, and plants grew better here than any greenhouse.

"Come on, slowpoke. You're not planning on standing there all day, are you?"

Zhinari stood arms folded about 20 feet ahead of him on the trail with Marinia and Matt.

"I'm coming."

He answered and hurriedly caught up, but he still couldn't keep his eyes from wandering along the tree tops, some of which were a mile high and nearly half a mile around. The portal closed as they walked away. It was a bright, sunny day, and they had arrived right in the middle of it. So absorbed was Koji that were it not for Marinia's hand on his shoulder, he would have completely missed the concealed door that served as entrance to the Abbey in which they were to stay. And a strange abbey it was indeed, for the entire thing was built under a great tree. The upper levels had been cunningly carved from the living tree itself, and the lower were a series of tunnels lit by windows and strangely bright torches.

They were greeted in the great main hall by a huge, old housekeeper.

"Welcome back!"

She spoke to Marinia, "I see you brought some friends!"

Marinia smiled.

"Yes, Esthra, This is Zhinari, Koji, and Matt."

"How nice to meet y'all! You'll have to forgive me if I don't remember you're names."

Koji shrugged.

"Its ok, I don't even remember yours."

Esthra smiled again, her whole face bursting into dimples.

"Well, then," She finally stated, "Shall I take y'all to your rooms?"

"Ok" Matt replied. Already he liked this Esthra housekeeper person.

The rooms were good sized, and luxurious in their own rustic way. They were neat, each bed was made with an orange, violet, and brown quilt, and the mattresses were stuffed with cotton and downy feathers, the pillows and sheets woven of fine, crisp linen.

After freshening up, Koji met Marinia in the hall between their two rooms and they both meandered outside, where a feast-like picnic had been set up. Everyone who lived in the abbey was present- from the ancient to the babies who couldn't even crawl yet. Marinia, Koji, and Zhinari sat on a blanket with Esthra.

"Well, I was hoping you would show up soon," Esthra was saying, "You know we don't have anyone with but the most basic of medical training, and there are several who require more advanced services than we know how to give within the abbey, and who knows who else in the surrounding areas." She shrugged and shook her head. Marinia disdainfully picked at the fruit-cream pastry before her. She was quiet for a moment before she spoke.

"After lunch I'll see to those at the abbey. Tomorrow I'll start out to check around the settlements and such in the forest."

Esthra nodded.

Koji went with Marinia to the abbey's sick bay at her request and helped with various tasks such as fetching herbs, bandages, and other things while she worked. It was well past suppertime when they finally finished. Marinia joined Koji in his room for a late meal. Afterwards, they both retired, and Koji promised to help with the rounds the next day.

Early the next morning, Koji and Marinia stopped in the abbey kitchens for breakfast. Hardly anyone aside from the cook was awake yet, so it was strangely quiet as they left for a head start.

The going was quick, and by the time they had left the third house, news had already gotten around that Marinia had returned.

Every family waited eagerly to greet the famed healer from the other side of the portal when she arrived at their dwelling.

They had lunch at the house of an elderly couple who had insisted they eat with them. By the end of the day, however, they were both glad to return to the abbey for dinner in the great hall.

Zhinari, who had been practice fighting with the young adults from all over, now sat with her own friends. "So, how did the rounds go?"

Marinia rested her head on her hand.

"Well, there are more sick people then there were the last time I was here. Little Kily broke her arm two weeks ago. I had to break it to re-set it. I don't know. It never gets easier when you come back especially after so long." She paused. "So, how was your day?"

Zhinari grinned mischievously.

"Well...I may have made your job a bit harder..."

Marinia poked at her salad.

"Why don't you go easier on those kids? They're never going to learn all the tricks you have up your sleeve."

Zhinari shook her head, half grinning.

"This is more fun."

Now Marinia shook her head, sighed, and finished her dinner.

Once they were done, Koji helped Marinia carry trays of food to the sickbay for the patients there, who ate while their bandages were changed and medicine was administered.

The two then returned the trays to the kitchen and stepped outside to enjoy the evening. Matt had retired early, and Zhinari sat outside sharpening her scimitar. They sat for a while discussing the uprising on Telbathia, their next destination.

Telbathia was a jungle/ ocean planet, and after a couple of weeks here, Koji and Marinia be going to that planet while Matt and Zhinari stayed on Ramnesh to await their return or a message. The Natives and defenders of Telbathia were close knit allies of all their home planets, but the invaders were powerful and already had a stronghold on the planet itself. As it would be suicide to face them alone, yet their allies had many who required medical attention, it was decided that Marinia and Koji would go alone, so as not to draw unnecessary and unwanted attention to their arrival and presence. At first, Matt and Zhinari had protested, but finally they realized that this was the only reasonable, logical course of action. After going over what they knew about the invaders and their location, Koji, Marinia, and Zhinari retired for the night.

## 2:Telbathia

The next two weeks were spent in much the same way as that day- making rounds to care for those in need of medical attention and anxiously anticipating the time when Marinia and Koji were to leave. That day came faster than expected.

A large group of townspeople gathered by the path as Marinia gave Esthra a few last minute instructions concerning the care of the patients. Matt and Zhinari walked Koji and Marinia to the portal, and after a

brief farewell, the latter dialed out and left.

The portal opened into a small, overgrown glade in the jungles of Telbathia. This particular portal hadn't been used since Marinia was about seven, nearly 6,580 years ago.

As she stepped through the portal, Marinia remembered the last time she had been here. It was many years ago, and she had been young, but as the only member of the royal family left able to travel, it was necessary that she be present for the signing of the peace treaty between Telbathia and her home planet of Fauntaine. It had been a colorful and happy occasion, with a feast and celebrations.

Were that she could have returned under those same situations, but times had changed. Now she was entering without anyone knowing-in secret. At least she had a friend with her now.

They had to be careful as they slunk through the forest, for this area had just recently been captured by enemy forces.

Several times they nearly stepped into traps.

They had just avoided one such trap when Marinia suddenly pulled Koji aside off the path into some bushes.

"Sssh!" She hissed in her startled friend's ear and pointed toward the path just ahead. Both sides had been completely filled with enemy tents and the path itself was blockaded with rubble.

Koji was dumbfounded by just how close this call had been.

One more step and they would have been prisoners or worse....

The two waited in the shrubs until nightfall, when they snuck around the encampment.

The moon was full, and by its light they traveled that night.

Mid morning they stopped for a little while, but it wasn't until late the night after that they reached friendly territory. They reached the main camp around midnight, and until morning, the guards on century duty held them in a decent, good sized prisoner cell for security purposes. When morning came, the eldest leader of the army himself came when they were let out.

Immediately he recognized Marinia from his teachings in the paintings of the famous day so long ago, though he himself was only 70.

"I hope you slept well..." He was unsure of what to say to this legend, "I am sorry about your ...um... accommodations last night..."

Marinia smiled benevolently.

"Completely understandable, general. Under current circumstances, this is a rather reasonable way of treating questionable intruders."

Koji was fascinated by the intricate armor worn by the soldiers and warriors gathered around, yet Marinia hardly seemed to notice it as she spoke.

"Your wounded- where are they?"

The general looked puzzled.

"In the infirmary tent- over there...but why? Most of their wounds are so serious that..."

Marinia interrupted him. "Just take me to them."

Koji had never seen Marinia work so fervently to cure wounds- little did he know that she worked also to save many of their lives, for, you see, many of the weapons that had caused them were rusty and poisoned. War wounds were nastier and more deadly than any other kind for this reason.

For two days and nights she worked without stopping for even a moment- every second counted.

The weariness began to show by the third morning, and by that evening she could barely stand without steadying herself on something. Koji brought her a damp cloth to wash her face, followed closely by the general, who spoke to Marinia.

"You rest. No one else I know of could have done what you have here- you are indeed a master healer; however even though I may not be even half your age, I can see that you need some rest."

Marinia wiped her hands on the cloth. "There's still so much to be done though..."

The general cocked his head at her. "I'll tell you what." he said. "You come over here, and you can tell us what to do."

Several kitchen girls and cooks, the only females in the camp, had volunteered to help with nursing and such. Most of them had seen Marinia working- what she did and how, and though they may not have been as skilled or fast as the healer, they were willing and able bodied.

Marinia consented to allow Koji to help her to a chair in the corner from where she could see and direct everything.

Finally they came to a point where all the wounded were stable and asleep. Koji then assisted the half asleep kit to a tent that had been prepared just for them. Lying down atop the blankets, Marinia was asleep in a matter of moments. Koji took the other bed and soon did the same.

3: Ambush

It was late that night or actually around 1:30 the next morning. The moon was full, but shrouded by clouds. Shadows started moving around the camp as dark forms took their places surrounding it. Koji awoke to a shadow being cast from outside the tent across his bed. Silently he crept over to wake Marinia.

"No....don't amputate..." she mumbled still half asleep, then snapped to her senses. "Huh...What? What is it?" she whispered to her friend, voice urgent. His eyes reflected a cautious fear as he pointed toward the moving shadows.

"Ambush!" she hissed as she quickly rose and slyly lead the way out the back of the tent, careful to stay in the tents shadow. Stealthily, the two slunk along until they reached the Infirmary tent. As Koji watched the entrance, Marinia crept along the isles, quietly waking the injured and warning them of the ambush. She then woke the two nurse-helpers who had been sleeping with the wounded and sent them to wake all the camp as silently as possible.

Marinia, leaving Koji to wait for the kitchen maids, then stole into the general's tent.

"What should we do?" he asked once informed of the situation. Marinia put a finger to her lips and ducked down as another intruder's shadow passed by outside.

"Ok, here's the idea," she whispered. "Have your fastest warriors attack and draw the invaders away from the camp. The rest of us will help the wounded escape to the old Erestoch Abby – they should be safe there."

The general nodded in agreement.

"I know just the ones- good thing they sleep close together..."

Just then, one of the nurses burst through the tent flap followed closely by Koji.

"Everyone's awake." She spoke quietly to Marinia.

"Good." Marinia replied.

"Karieesh, go and fetch Nepra and the others of the green flag. Be careful they are not seen coming here." The general instructed.

The helper nodded and was gone in a flash.

Mansto had been nervous sense he first heard of the plan of an ambush on the defender's base camp. Several members of his brigade had been slain by this enemy and he didn't like the idea of attacking at night. As he stared at the dark tents, he thought he saw a shadow move. No, there was nothing there...but there it was again...then it was gone. Mansto shook his head. He must be seeing things. 18 or 20 soldiers gathered crouching behind a large tent, just out of sight from the group of enemy invaders who were hiding in the forest right outside of camp. Nepra gave his brigade their instructions. "Go around either side of the enemy. Try to gain as much attention as possible from the rest of the invaders surrounding the camp. Once you have as many of the enemy forces after you as you can handle, lead them away from here- into their own traps if possible. You may lead them wherever you

want, as long as it's away from the camp and the old Abby. Got it?"

The entire group nodded.

"Right-o, well, have at you then!"

Nepra shouted the signal for the attack and his soldiers charged, shouting as loudly as they could. Marinia and Koji heard the signal and nodded for the rest of the soldiers to prepare to carry or help the wounded person they had been assigned to. A few long seconds later, a scout entered announcing that most of the ambushers had gone after the green flags. The soldiers carrying the stretchers went out first, as they could run faster. The others waited a few moments then started out after them.

Koji and Marinia stood outside directing the wounded and their helpers as they left the tent.

Suddenly, only a few seconds after the last ones were out of sight, five invaders charged in. They spotted Koji and Marinia before they could hide. Side by side, the two ran as fast as they could, the enemy close on their trail. Into the forest they fled, bushes, fern, and trees whizzing by them and the shouts of their pursuers constantly on their tails {literally}.

Then it happened.

Koji's foot caught on a root and he fell. A moment later, Marinia had stopped and turned around, a wild, concerned look in her eyes.

"Ooowww, sheee.....He drew his breath sharply in pain.

Marinia was at his side in an instant.

"My...ankle..." he breathed in agony.

There was no mistaking it, he had a nasty sprain.

The enemy's voices drew closer as Marinia glanced up, trying to think of what to do.

"Come on!" she hoisted him up onto his good leg and helped him off to the right. Eyes tight and teeth clenched against the pain, Koji leaned heavily on Marinia as he tried to run with her.

The trees were too thick to fly, and even on the ground it was hard to keep their footing.

The voices came nearer and nearer.

They came to a small clearing.

Koji stumbled – he could run no longer. Marinia desperately shot a wild glance around. There was only enough space for to fly alone.

She looked at her friend- he looked so painful and helpless as he braced his hands against the back of his neck.

"I wish there was some other way," Marinia spoke half to her friend, half to herself, "But I'm going to have to leave you for now...I'll get you back-I promise."

A tear formed in the corner of her eye as she glanced back before silently gliding above the treetops from where she could watch what happened below. She choked back her anger as the soldiers drew closer.

4:captured

Koji watched helplessly as the five monsters of soldiers came into the clearing where he lay. Two of the smaller ones prodded him with their spears.

"Get up, Get up!"

Koji shrank back.

"I can't!" he growled.

The largest of the five pushed past his two comrades.

"Morons" he grumbled, bending down and slinging Koji's entire body over his shoulder none too gently.

"Let's go." He grunted.

As he was being carried off, Koji looked up to where Marinia hovered overhead, sword drawn, glowing in the moonlight, waiting to follow when they were far enough away that the nearsighted soldiers couldn't see her.

Koji watched the whole way back to the enemy camp to catch glimpses of Marinia whenever he could; he wanted to be sure she was still following.

In the invader's camp, the prisoners, who were few, were kept in crude but sturdy cages- like animals. The large soldier roughly tossed Koji into one of these cages and locked the door.

Once the soldiers were gone, Koji looked around. In one of the cages next to his, a warrior sat; chin resting on his knees, staring into space.

Koji leaned his head back and stared at the sky.

Marinia knelt concealed in a tree nearby, watching and making a mental note of the layout of the enemy camp.

Dawn had broken several hours earlier as Koji slowly awoke. One of the enemy soldiers was unlocking the door to his cage. A tall, lanky, crooked creature of a person entered and spoke in a squeaky, cackling voice. "Now there, my precious, let me see that foot of yours."

Koji growled and inched back. The strange man reached out a long, dirty hand toward Koji's foot. Koji, growling, snapped out and bit the stranger's arm. The stranger drew back as if Koji had rabies and left the cage hurriedly.

Koji snarled and glared at him as the soldier locked the door again.

No one noticed Marinia as she quietly flew away.

The old abbey was in a bustle of activity as the wounded were taken inside when they arrived. Marinia flew in as the last stragglers limped in. Immediately after landing, she hurried past the wounded to find the general. She asked one of the kitchen maids who directed her to the old church's library, where she found him taking count of everyone who had already come in.

"Thank you; that looks like everyone." he told an assistant who had just handed him a paper with the names of everybody who had come through the front gate. The assistant walked away as Marinia approached the leader.

"Ah, your majesty!" he greeted her, then noticing the urgent, anxious look on her face as well as Koji's absence from her side, asked what happened.

Marinia shook her head. "I'll explain later. I need five of your most skilled warriors right now."

"Why?"

"Koji was captured."

The general nodded. "Alright, well, you're going to have to decide for yourself who you want to take with you. I'm not very good at this choosing bit, and I'm not exactly sure what you're looking for."

"Thank you." Marinia replied before quickly walking off to choose her five men.

5:hope and help

Esthra was getting worried. Koji and Marinia were nearly a week late returning and they still weren't back yet.

Back and forth she paced in the main hall like a worried old mother hen.

Matt stood against a wall rubbing the back of his neck. "They probably just had more wounded to care for than they thought." He tried to calm her.

She wrung her hands. "Oooh, I hope you're right..."

Zhinari had several of the eldest teens to the clearing in front of the portal where she watched them practice battle with staves, occasionally batting one or braining the other; she was pretty much bored.

Koji eased his shoe off his swollen foot, a deep, long gash cut along the side of his ankle. It was sticky with dark blood.

Painfully, he used a strip of cloth from his shirt to clean it as best he could, then he bound it to close the

wound.

Suddenly, something in the forest caught his eye.

Marinia was slowly sneaking toward him.

Soon, she was within a few feet of his cage. She then deftly cast her medical dagger to his feet. Around it was wrapped a damp cloth with a note pinned to it which read "Hang in there, were coming".

He looked up but Marinia was already gone. He re-cleaned his wound with the damp cloth and re-banded it. Marinia had treated the cloth with soothing herbs, so he left it on the inside of the bandage when he re-tied it. Gratefully he felt the cool herbs take their effect and relieve the pain- it wasn't completely gone, but it felt much better.

He slid the dagger into a pocket on the inside of his vest.

The guard was still looking the other way.

Marinia left her five hand-picked warriors by the portal on Telbathia while she went back to Ramniesh.

Zhinari looked up, somewhat surprised, as the portal opened and Marinia swept through. She had been just about to leave through the portal when her friend came through.

"Zhinari, go get Matt, I need you both to come with me- Please!"

Zhinari looked quizzically at her friend. "...why?"

"Koji is being held in the invader's camp...I need your help with another diversion..."

"Okk...."

Zhinari paused and sent the youths- who had been trying to convince her to stay- back, instructing them to send Matt back and to assure Esthra that everything was alright.

About 20 minutes later Matt came running up the path. "What's going on?"

Marinia explained the situation as briefly as possible.

"Alright...but how do we help?" Matt wanted to know.

"I need one of you to create a distraction while the other gets the keys; the doors to the cages don't have hinges that can be taken apart. I have five men waiting to help me draw the guards away from the cells on the other side of the portal, but I need you to set him free."

"Well, let's go!" Once again the wild fire of battle entered Zhinari's eyes. "This is getting personal."

The three passed through the portal and met the warriors on the other side. They briefly went over plans; then at twilight put them into action. Zhinari crept toward the tent in which the keys were stored.

Two guards stood on either side of the entrance.

She quickly sped up, tagged one of them with her sword, then disappeared behind the tent. Coming around the other side, she repeated this performance. In response, both guards hurried around to the back of the tent where Zhinari's black blade waited to finish them off.

Meanwhile, Matt had slid inside and was searching for the keys. Zhinari joined him and soon they found the iron ring on which the keys were hung.

Marinia and her men had stayed just inside the forests cover and gained the guards attention by throwing rocks at them. As hoped, they had come, searching, in pursuit.

This gave Matt and Zhinari the time they needed.

Koji awoke to the sound of someone fumbling with his lock. He could make out two forms in the dark.

The one unlocking his door was unmistakably Matt. The other, he soon saw, was Zhinari.

Soon, Marinia swooped in and joined them. As soon as the door was open, it was Marinia who entered after him. She lifted him in her arms, and as Matt and Zhinari made their escape into the forest, she rose into the air high above the clearing and carried him to the portal where she set him down to await the return of the others.

It was too risky for anyone to try to return to the old abbey, so they all went back through the portal to Ramniesh.



It was late in the night when Esthra heard knocking on the door. Eight figures stood before her, a ninth was being carried by one of them. Once inside she recognized four of them. “Zhinari, Matt...Marinia! What happened to your friend?!?”

Koji had fallen asleep.

“He’ll be fine; it’s just a sprain.” Marinia explained, bringing her friend to his room to care for his wound while he slept.

6:Wars and healing

While Koji healed, Marinia and Zhinari visited several planets and gathered ally troops to help on Telbathia.

When they returned with the armies, Marinia in the lead, Koji met them outside.

The cut had not completely healed, but he could now walk with little pain.

They would only be on Ramniesh for a few hours, and Marinia took Koji aside from the crowd. “How do you feel?” she asked him.

“Almost as good as new, thanks to your healing.” He replied.

“Do you feel up to traveling?” she looked into his eyes. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but I could really use your help ...”

“With what?” he sounded a bit apprehensive.

“There will be many casualties. Someone needs to remain at the old abbey to lead the guard forces- someone who I can trust. Zhinari needs to be with me on the battlefield and Matt...well, I would feel safer with you in charge- or at least helping him.”

“Oh... I guess so...”

She sensed his unsureness; Koji had never been cut out as a leader. She rested her hand on his shoulder. “It is unlikely the enemy will locate the abbey, all you need to do is keep an eye on everything that’s going on...if any trouble does happen, just blow this. The soldiers will know what to do.” She handed him an intricately carved ivory horn.

“Ok.” he replied. “I think I can do that.”

Marinia nodded to him, eyes glowing with gratitude. “Good and thank you.” It was nearly time to head out. “Excuse me.” She hurried to the portal.

“First group?”

Five soldiers stepped forward and she allowed them passage through the portal to Telbathia. Every five minutes for the next two hours she let groups varying in size from five to fifteen warriors to pass through, giving those who were already there time to get to a certain, designated field undetected. The last group to go through consisted of the five warriors Marinia had brought with her; they were to wait for Marinia, Zhinari, Koji, and Matt to follow.

Once on Telbathian soil, Marinia sent Koji and Matt with the five warriors to the old abbey, then she and Zhinari went to the field where the rest of their army had already set up camp in preparation for battle. It was a formidable army Marinia and Zhinari had been able to gather, but the enemy nearly had them matched.

Strategy, Marinia dreaded, would be the only thing that would win them this war.

In the mid afternoon, a scout reported that enemy scouts had seen their encampment and had reported back to their leaders.

Early that evening the Telbathian troops arrived, half doubling their size.

Many guards stood duty that night while most of the army slept.

The enemy army did not show up until the next morning; a bugle announced their approach and the warriors stood stock still, armed and ready for the oncoming attackers.

Koji sat atop a parapet on one side of the old abbey's wall. Several soldiers were posted on various positions all around the wall, watching for the first wounded or any sign of an enemy, whichever came first. He had never been a leader; he just wasn't good at it, as he never had been meant to be. Here, he was merely part of a team. The guards, soldiers, and nurses knew their tasks, and even helped Koji if he didn't know what he was doing. Some of the soldiers had leadership experience, so they knew what needed to be done.

It was quiet, and Koji felt strangely calm; almost peaceful.

The opposite was true of the battlefield. Tension was high as warriors and soldiers stood in noiseless stances, senses sharp and eyes keen for any movement of the enemy. Every breath, fly buzzing, every shift or movement, any sound whatsoever, no matter how slight, seemed singled out and echoed in the suns shimmering rays.

A single hand gloved in rough, dark leather rose slowly, almost ceremoniously; then stopped mid-air. It then slashed down as if in simultaneous slow motion with the invader troops which it commanded to a steady advance. Their wild, bloodthirsty eyes reflected their vicious, unrefined skills as they met the steady, calm, and ready gaze of the ancient masters of war from numerous other allied planets.

But the brute strength did not count for nothing against the skilled ones.

With a great clashing of weapons, the two forces met. The battle had begun.

Marinia and Zhinari stood back to back amidst the battle as so often they had in past fights, each defending the other as well as themselves while inflicting considerable damage on the enemy forces.

Casualties for both sides were numerous, but there were few deaths on the defenders side when compared to the numbers of invaders who would lie slain in the field by the end of that day.

The battle raged on into the night as good fought to expel evil from the land.

Marinia moved around sending and helping the wounded from her troops back to a smaller clearing just beyond the battle where she could assess their wounds. There she would decide whether they could make it back the abbey or if they needed immediate attention.

On her trips to and from the battle scene, Zhinari accompanied her, helping to ward off attackers. She had just returned from one such trip when Matt came into the medical clearing. She finished with the warrior on whom she had been applying a bandage, then turned to Matt.

"What brings you here?"

Matt shrugged.

"Koji sent me to see if I could help out here." he glanced toward the battlefield.

She nodded gently toward where Zhinari fought on the outskirts of the battle waiting for her to return.

"You can go with Zhinari—help get the wounded back here."

Matt shrugged, "Ok." and did as he had been instructed.

Marinia shook her head. Usually Matt wasn't so agreeable.

Back at the abbey, Koji was finding that being in charge was no simple task. Whenever there was a problem, question, or decision that needed to be made or fixed, everyone came to him. His ankle had once again started to bother him, so he had sat down at the bottom of the stairs leading to the wall top. He had two especially experienced warriors with him helping organize and direct the goings on. Just a little while ago Matt had been all over the place and generally in everyone's way; certainly not helping, so he had sent him to the battlefield to help Marinia and the others- at least they could get him to do something useful.

The wounded had started arriving about two hours after Koji and Matt had arrived with the five elite warriors. After that the entire abbey grounds had become a hustle of activity. Places were created

everywhere for the injured to sit or lie down. One especially ambitious nurse had started directing the other nurses concerning what needed to be done, who needed tending and what needed to be fetched. Koji found this most helpful, but soon some of the other nurses started complaining about her assumption of command. Koji wished Marinia was there as grumbling nurses started gathering around him. One of them spoke up.

“Heronetta,” for that was the ambitious nurses name, “Never even spoke up before, and now she’s telling us all what to do? It just isn’t right.”

The other nurses nodded and mumbled in agreement.

Koji didn’t know what to do.

Help came in an unlikely place.

Heronetta herself spoke up. “We need some organization- I’m only trying to help. There are many wounded that need assistance. Master Matt just returned, and has informed me that Princess Marinia needs some of back at the battlefield. Choose among yourselves who will go, but the rest of you- at least half- need to stay here and help me.”

Almost immediately the crowd was divided into two nearly even halves.

Matt stepped forward. “Uh...whoever’s going back with me, let’s go.”

Once Matt and his group of nurses with their two escorts were gone, Heronetta addressed the crowd that was left.

“As long as all the wounded are cared for, I won’t tell you what to do. Just if you do need instructions, come find me and I’ll help you.”

Everyone agreed that this was fair, and soon they were all back to work.

Koji wasn’t sure what had just happened, but he was glad the dispute was over.

Marinia looked up gratefully as Matt returned again with the requested assistants.

After the second day of battle, the nearly completely wiped-out invaders surrendered. Count was taken of who and how many soldiers from each planet had been injured, then those who could travel returned to their homes with reports for their rulers or leaders on who would be returned later.

The prisoners were sent with various armies to be transported by ship to deserted planets that were known to have no portals on them.

Finally all the hyper-activity had settled down, and that night Marinia and Koji sat together on the wall top of the abbey.

“I heard you did well keeping things under control here.”

Koji smiled and shook his head. “I never realized how hard your job can be. I mean, telling people what to do, where to go...where to put this and that...there’s so much to keep track of.”

Marinia looked at him as he continued.

“Everyone else was so much help. They seemed to know just what to do—like leaders should.”

“Leaders don’t always know what to do. Sometimes it takes quite a bit of figuring out.” She paused.

“Some people were born to be leaders.”

Koji nodded. “I wasn’t.” he replied.

His friend looked out over the trees at the stars.

“I know, Koji. I know.”