



Many Shades of Helaggó

Wanda Zuzanna of Helaggó

Written by Wendi Coffman Porter

World Design by Richard W. Porter III

“

She was a true example of chaos incarnate, but not a purely destructive chaos, more like the beautiful chaos of a Dolluk painting or dark matter. There are many that believed she was simply a thief and a murderer, but that was never the case. She was never...

and I do mean never...simple.

”

-Leon Hamilton

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A loud ping rang throughout the upper decks of the sizable catamaran, audible even despite the wind in the sails and the water rushing past the dual hulls.

“Sadie!” The abnormally large male wastelander, named Zerrick, hollered down into the main deck. He had been on the bridge for the last few hours learning how the sensor gear worked.

“Yeah, yeah, I heard it. I am not deaf.” The tall, elegant, white-haired elf stepped out of the main cabin area onto the deck and looked up at him. Her long hair pulled back into a bun to keep the wind from tangling it up. The usually fashionable elf was more casually dressed than usual, in a tight t-shirt, jeans and her favorite pair of desert camo boots.

The boots had been one more thing she’d found hidden on her new ship. Yet another clear indication that her long dead lover hadn’t moved on after she was sentenced to five thousand years in prison. Instead, he’d scoured the world and surrounding solar systems, looking for every emergency drop-cash he knew about. She honestly wondered if he left any of her stashes. Though, now that she thought of it, none of her drops were designed for five-hundred years. Let alone five thousand. Odds were that they were all gone, no matter how she looked at it.

“That was the sonar. So, look to the larger screen on the right with the two-color image. What does it look like?”

“Um...”

She waited while he tried to interpret the image. Sonar was a tricky tool, but damn useful once someone mastered it. It was a two-week trip back to Bugrasi. Which meant she had plenty of time to help Zerrick get good enough at the new tool to be useful in the future.

“It’s definitely manufactured, it’s not natural.” He called to her as she walked back into the main cabin and finished pouring herself a drink.

"Okay?" The called back to him.

"A ship!" he called excitedly. "It's a sunken ship! I can see the break in the spiny belly thing."

"Keel." She grumbled, rolling her eyes. Laying a hand gently on the leather-bound book on the bar, she smiled weakly as she traced the embossed title with her fingertips.

The Many Shades of Helagg.

Without skimming the pages, she already knew what this story was about. She'd been seriously drunk when she'd told him about that trip. But then, she'd been drunk for several weeks after that event. It wasn't surprising that he used it to get the story out of her. It wasn't a story she wanted anyone to know, ever. But he'd claimed some crap about closure helping her to deal with whatever happened. It had been a mistake, and she knew it. Even as she told him the parts of the story, she was comfortable sharing. One of the many downsides of alcohol, she supposed.

The next day he begged her to let him write it down. She'd refused. Clearly her incarceration had somehow removed his need to keep his promise. A slight smirk crept into the corner on her mouth as she realized that she'd never actually demanded his word on the matter.

"Holy crap!"

A large reptilian tail dropped over the upper deck into the doorway of the main cabin. Clearly the rock lizard was on the bridge again, checking to see what its master was doing.

Pushing the tail aside, Sadie stepped past, carrying her drink and the book. Making her way up the stairs to the bridge, she saws the abnormally large human male tapping the sonar screen.

"Look, I can even read the name on front!" He exclaimed excitedly.

"It's called a prow, and yes. The resolution is not bad on that unit." She smiled warmly and moved to look around him to see the entire panel. The radar to the left of the sonar image showed three blips on the screen. Where the image he was pointing to showed a clearly sunken vessel resting on a ledge far below them.

The ship was moving too fast moment to get any good visuals in actual time. So, they were simply collecting images that matched a certain parameter, such as non-natural.

The odd waste-lander barbarian, who was wearing military style pants and boots from her age, and a loincloth tied over the top of them as a belt, beamed at her proudly. Despite his stone age upbringing, he was oddly adept at picking up her more advanced technology. Even though he still crept her out slightly, with his faintly glowing eyes and clearly tribal roots. He was an entertaining traveling companion, to say the least.

Patting him on his bare shoulder. She marveled, and not for the first time, at how tough this human was. Even his skin was harder than it should be, more like his rock-lizard companion than any normal human.

"You've got the hang of it." Pointing past him to the two blips at the outer edges of the radar, she added, "what about those though?"

"What?" He shifted his attention, and she heard him cuss under his breath. "Damnit!" He leapt from the upper deck, caught the main spar on the sail and landed on the deck gently. The first time he'd leapt from the top deck to the main deck, he rocked the ship so hard that the wizard almost fell. She threatened to make him swim the five-hundred miles home, which he briefly considered. Ever since then, he and the lizard were doing better about rocking the ship too much.

"Trajectory?" He called from the large, mounted camera on the prow of the ship.

"Come two-one-two." She replied. Settling into the chair at the console, she set her drink in the cup holder and rested the book in her lap.

She could hear him talking to the lizard, as he took several pictures of the ship in the distance. All he could see at this distance was the mast, but that was all they needed. These locals could derive basic size and colors from just the masts of a vessel. She didn't feel the need to tell Zerrick that they could also launch drones and get more data if they required it. Since the photos were for the Bugrasi King, she knew they would already be more than his stone age government was used to.

Opening the main cover of the book, she began reading the forward.



Humans, elves, dwarves, orcs... really all the traditional bipedal humanoids that are found across the Tharward arm of the galaxy, have one similarity. We all have many faces. Before you get upset, please realize that I am not saying that everyone is a two-faced liar. I simply mean that we all, every one of us, have different behaviors depending on the audience.

We act differently in front of our parents than we do in front of our friends. We behave differently in front of complete strangers, then we would in front of government authorities. Those behaviors will change even further when you consider digital mediums.

For example, we text differently than we talk. Or in in virtual spaces, for example, we say and do things we might never even consider doing in person. This is a normal facet of culture. Many people will tell you that honestly is easier to remember than multiple personalities. And they are right, to some degree. But no matter how honest you are, you still will have micro shifts in your behaviors, based on the audience.

Here's the rub, though. Throughout our lives, we develop these intricate behaviors to the point we often lose track of who we really are. Everyone loses themselves in their lives. Most can never find the authentic versions of themselves again. Instead, they live their lives going through the various pretend people, never know who the real one is.

Then you will occasionally come across some people who embrace the falseness of it. Shade was one of those people. I wish I could tell you she was better than the rest of us, because she always knew who she was, but that would be a disservice to you and her.

Shade never knew who she was from moment to moment, always keeping her personal reality utterly fluid. But she embraced that fact and never claimed to be any one person in particular.

She was an authentic example of chaos incarnate, but not a purely destructive chaos, more like the beautiful chaos of a Dolluk painting or dark matter. There are many that believed she was simply a thief and a murderer, but that was never the case. She was never... and I mean **never**... simple.

