



Shades of War

Written by Wendi Coffman Porter

World Design by Richard W. Porter III

“

No matter where you find life, you will find others that have died to support that life. The largest trees in the forest killed hundreds of weaker trees to survive. Such is the way of life. Yet every once in a while, we as advanced beings, make the choice to preserve weaker life when we can. And THAT is what makes us superior.

”

-Leon Hamilton

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Janrun 30th, 26552

Sadie Feelari, a tall, elegant elf, stood with her hands clasped behind her back facing the floor to ceiling window. Staring out over the city lights far below. The lights twinkled, creating a beautiful sea of movement sprawled out before her. It ended at the dark shores of the ocean in the distance. Her long hair hung down her back unbound, wrapping her in a cloak of pure white. Smiling, she sighed.

“Add the minor moon, waning, just over the horizon.” She stated, her voice carrying in the large office.

A soft blue moon appeared just over the horizon and her smile widened.

“Perfect. Save and add to favorites.” She called as she turned away from the enormous wall. There was a soft chime as the image flickered, then settled into place as a moving background image.

The desk was also perfect, an almost exact duplicate of the desk that had been in her office on the top floor of the Shadowband Solutions Arcology needle. The plush black carpets, dark blueish-grey walls and chrome trim were throughout the office, and the facility. Except, of course, in the apartments of her current partners.

The look gave the office a dark, but powerful feel. There were two overstuffed, black, leather chairs in front of her desk, but she knew good and well that this office would never see guests. This was the new Shadowband Solutions R&D facility. Situated a quarter of a mile below the surface of the ocean. In a potentially hostile country. So, secrecy was the name of the game this time. Unlike the Shadowband solutions of old which stood tall and proud no matter where the offices were. Either planet side or on the various proprietary space-stations, found in the four dozen solar systems that were home to the mega-corp.

Waving her hand from left to right across the room, a dozen holographic whiteboards appeared. Six of them had the designs and math for the new ship design. That she hadn't finished yet. She still need to fly the Lion's Shade as a test before she could complete the math. No amount of simulations were a suitable replacement for

experience. She was ready to sail, but Jane was still working on her current project. A disturbing duplicate of the Polaris rings, but on a much smaller scale.

Reversing the wave of her hand, the boards vanished. Collecting up the book resting on the desk, she left the office.

As she wound her way through the massive facility, she smiled. It had once been an Imperial Storage Depot, and secret base for spying on the Republic owned world of Taius. But when the three of them had found it at the bottom of the ocean, it was more of a sealed tomb of historical artifacts than anything else. Most which, she had recycled to build her new Shadowband Solutions R&D facility. A facility that had built in security through obscurity, for now. The descendants of the secret Imperial base, that were on land, far above them, had no ability to handle the water pressure at this depth. Thusly ensuring that the base would remain hidden until their technology sufficiently advanced to handle exploring the bottom of the ocean.

Using the recycled materials, and a Ruby Aide Society printer that they had found in the attached Ruby Storage Depot. Sadie had built a place that felt more familiar to her. She'd been sure to include whatever the team would need for research, though she doubted that either of her teammates would even use it. The facility had a full alchemy lab, a full gun range, and four different engineering labs. The last of which, was a large empty room, for the wizard to fill as she saw fit.

The other three engineering labs were for her and Zerrick. One had several tables and mounts designed to work with large, heavy pieces of armor and mecha. Another was the engine and ship-part manufacturing lab. While the third was for weapons design. She had already stocked with several racks of Republic and Imperial weapons that they found stored in the facility, before they took it over.

Along with the R&D, she'd made the three of them full sized apartments. Being sure to put plenty of self-maintained plants in Zerrick's apartment so that he would feel more at home. Janes apartment, however, Sadie had moved the woman's magical yurt into. Most technology didn't work around the wizard, anyway. So building her a high-tech apartment was a waste of resources. Giving her a space to keep her portable wizard's tower seemed practical. She didn't expect the woman to stay anyway once the gate was up and working.

Walking out into the massive lobby, she grinned. The building didn't have a front door per se, so the lobby was more of a common area. It had a full bar, a large table for the team to dine or collaborate. A half of a dozen sectional couches and about a dozen single overstuffed chairs. She had also filled the room with plants and at one end, there was an enormous greenhouse. Sadie had prepped it for whatever her two companions

wanted to grow. She had even been careful to build it large enough to handle the banana trees for Slappy.

The large shirtless waste-lander stood in the middle of the room with a large bucket next to him. In it were a dozen large space-steal spears. He was tossing them at a wall where he had drawn several pictures of abnormally large cockroaches and other heavily mutated creatures.

As the steel spear embedded into the wall a good foot, Sadie cringed. She'd need to reinforce that wall if that was going to be the man's new pastime.

"Still nothing?" She asked the irritated barbarian.

His people didn't like being indoors, let alone on the bottom of the ocean. They liked wide open spaces. And she couldn't help but wonder if he was dealing with claustrophobia, or just cabin fever. They'd been down here almost two months now. And even she was ready to get back up top and get moving.

The Lion's Shade was deep sea anchored above them, and they had been going back and forth to the ship as she printed the parts here, then took them up to the ship to install. But it wasn't the same.

As she watched him toss another spear into the wall, she couldn't help wondering what kept him here with her and the wizard. The only thing that came up with was that somewhere, before Sadie had come into the picture, the waste-lander had bonded with Jane. Either physically or just emotionally and now considered her family. Neither of them seemed to be sexually interested in the other, but they were close, nonetheless.

"Nope." He grumbled. "I haven't even seen her for two weeks." He added, sighing. For a large barbarian type, he had an unsettling lack of temper. It was one of the many things, regarding this man, that concerned Sadie.

She'd known a lot of soldiers in her long lifetime. A few of them had been like the waste-lander. Utterly calm, all the time, no matter what. But when they blew... well, the body count was always disturbing, even for her.

"I'm pretty sure she is still working on the ring."

He shrugged and turned to face her. He was shirtless again, but at least now he usually wore pants and shoes. His overly muscled chest rippled in the light and she couldn't help but smirk. In her day, the only way to get a body like that was with drugs. But there was no drug like that in this world, which meant he was just a mutant. Like most of his tribe.

"Can you even find a door to the thing?" He asked, his shoulder sagging.

Her smirk widened as she realized he was growing annoyed. “No, but then she is an arch-wizard. She’s going to do what she is going to do.”

“But how are we supposed to use it? Or get anything through it if there is no door?” He folded his arms across his chest. “Wasn’t that the whole point of this place?”

Sadie found a comfortable chair and half fell, half sat into it. Propping her feet up on a nearby low table, she resisted the urge to laugh at the man. “Relax, Zerrick. I am sure it’s just a security thing.” She shrugged, she had no idea what the woman was doing, but then she wasn’t an arch-wizard. Honestly, she believed the woman might pull this off, but she was having trouble fathoming it.

“You want security, let’s move the whole thing to the tribe. They will secure it.”

Sadie snorted quietly; she couldn’t help herself. “I am not even going to start with the long list of things that are wrong with that idea.”

He spun, snatching up a spear, and threw it a little too hard at the wall. It buried itself a good three feet into the plascrete wall, and Sadie felt a slight sense of panic.

“I am very glad I adjusted your designs and had the manufacturing bots reinforce that wall.” A metallic sounding voice floated up behind her, as a mechanical arm reached into view with a glass of Cognac. “Would you like lunch as well?”

“Yes T4, thank you. And seriously, thank you.” She pointed to the wall that just sprouted another spear.

“You are quite welcome. And as for the wall, that was for me as much as it was for you. He’s been getting more and more agitated over the last few weeks.” The bot’s voice dropped several decibels as it attempted to whisper.

She nodded and looked down to the book in her lap. The cover was dark grey leather with scorch marks across it. It looked like something Sadie might find in a burned-out house, which she knew was the point.

The gold inlaid title read, *Shades of War*. She couldn’t help but wonder how he wrote this one. She’d been rather tight-lipped about that event in her life, but Leon knew the other person who had been there. If he got the woman to talk, after they incarcerated Shade, he might have been able to piece together more of the story. If he wrote it true to the actual events, though... well, she certainly would not be the heroine. Flipping the cover open in her lap, she read the forward.

