

Betrayal of Doom by catwoman
Part 2

Author's Chapter Notes:

Dream sequence in italics. Graphic Violence. Mild Language: "Bastard".

The wind howled outside as Keith turned uneasily in his sleep, dreaming of Allura.

She was running through the royal garden, the tiered skirts of her gown flowing out in pink streams behind her. Sunshine danced upon her hair as she glanced over her shoulder. Her eyes sparkled, and her musical laughter carried on the wind.

As she descended deeper into the swirling mists of the forest, she heard a familiar voice calling her name. She ran faster and abruptly came to a stop in front of a huge rosebush that blocked the path.

An unusual snow-white bloom stood out among the numerous red ones. She leaned forward to inhale its exotic fragrance, gently bending the stem toward her with one delicate hand.

Suddenly the flower mutated into the shape of a full-grown man. The princess gasped as Lotor embraced her tightly and faded away with her into the mist amid peals of maniacal laughter.

Keith sat up with a start, breathing heavily.

He glanced at his clock: one a.m.

Looking over at his window, he saw brilliant flashes of lightning flickering over and over. Instinctively he thought, "Trouble!"

He kicked off his blankets and lunged for the window. Looking up and to the right, he could just see the princess's balcony. His breath caught in his throat. A black shape hovered nearby. Keith's eyes widened as he realized what it was and to whom it belonged!

He ran across the room to a control panel, slapped a button with his palm, and cried out: "Wake up, everyone! Lotor is here! To the princess's room at once!"

A jarring alarm blared throughout the sleeping palace. Keith pulled on some pants, grabbed his pistol, and bolted from the room.

As he careened down the hallway, Hunk, Pidge, and Lance stumbled from their rooms looking tired and drained.

"The princess?" Hunk shouted as Keith shot past him to an elevator.

“Lotor's in her chamber! Hurry!”

The Force dashed into the lift and were quickly carried five levels up. They burst out of the elevator and reached Allura's room at the same time as Coran.

“The defense shield failed!” he exclaimed.

“Yes!” Keith agreed. “No doubt Haggar is here!”

The door slid open before them. With pistol ready, Keith cautiously looked inside. As his eyes adjusted to the gloomy darkness, he saw Allura's disheveled bed standing bereft of its occupant.

Just then the movement of a shape swaying just beyond the balcony caught his eye. On his signal the group rushed forward through the chamber and out to the railing. Lotor was lowering Allura into his ship's open cockpit. Hearing their rapidly approaching footsteps, his head snapped around toward them.

“Fools! You're too late! Allura is mine!” he called, flashing an evil grin.

“Give her back, son of Zarkon!” Coran bellowed, fists trembling.

“Over my dead body! I've waited too long for this, and neither you nor anyone else will stop me!” the dark prince hissed.

Lance took aim on Lotor, but Keith forced his arm down. “No! You might hit the princess!”

“Wise decision, simpleton!” Lotor jeered.

Just then, Nanny ran out onto the balcony. She stopped short when she saw Allura in Lotor's arms. Tears filled her eyes. “No! Please don't take her away from me!” she pleaded, wringing her hands.

Pleased at the sight of her anguish, Lotor replied soothingly, “Oh, you will see her again, my good woman,” he paused, letting her hope rekindle, “But only in your dreams!” he finished with a cruel laugh.

“Noooo!” Nanny sobbed, crumpling to the floor. Coran was instantly at her side.

“You fiend!” Keith shouted, “You won't escape! Voltron will stop you!”

Lotor glared at his rival for the princess, “Oh really? Your Voltron is crippled now that your team is not complete, and if you look behind me, you will see that your troubles aren’t over!”

Emerging from the storm was the biggest and most destructive looking robeast the team had ever seen. Twice the size of Voltron, this half-living, half-mechanical horror descended slowly from the roiling clouds, shrieking like a banshee. Its four spiderlike arms, thick as tree trunks, were covered with spiny hairs and ended in huge clawed appendages that snapped menacingly. Its large, armored chest, riddled with numerous weapons ports, was almost as wide as the castle’s main tower. In contrast, its head was absurdly small, with one glistening, red eye sunk deep into the flat forehead. Below the luminous orb was a gaping mouth flecked with foam and lined with jagged, gnashing teeth. Crowning the beast’s head were two large, twisted horns that seemed to be drawing lightning toward them. Two long, massive legs ending in taloned feet completed this vision from hell.

“My God!” exclaimed Pidge.

“You are doomed!”, Lotor crooned. "This robeast will obliterate your puny Voltron and destroy the castle! When I return with my fleet from Planet Doom, you will beg me for mercy!”

Keith's eyes bored into Lotor's. “You may think you’ve won, but I will soon follow, and when I find you, you’re going to wish I hadn’t!”

Lotor threw the VF’s fiery leader a black look. “Spare your impotent threats, weakling, and be glad that I don’t kill you now!”

With a final, gloating look at his adversaries, Lotor dropped into his seat with the unconscious princess beside him, closed the canopy, and wheeled the ship about. With a deafening blast from its thrusters, the craft roared off into the clouds, disappearing from sight. Meanwhile the robeast moved in closer and closer. . . .

Coran helped Nanny regain her footing and assisted her back to the hallway. The poor woman was beside herself with grief.

He swallowed hard. “Courage, Elizabeth. We will get her back!” Nanny looked up at him and nodded pitifully.

“We must get to Castle Control!” he commanded. Everyone swiftly obeyed. The first shocks of the attack were felt throughout the castle. The robeast opened fire, repeatedly hammering the metallic structure.

Upon entering Castle Control, Coran's eyes swiftly flew to his console. There was indeed evidence of someone or something having tampered with his settings. He ground his teeth. "Shields at maximum!" he shouted. Instantly an invisible barrier surrounded the castle, and the blows became less severe. "All regiments proceed to Sector A at once!" Soon the area was filled with tanks and ground personnel returning fire.

"What will we do about the Blue Lion?" Hunk asked. "We need it to form Voltron!" There was momentary silence as everyone looked at each other uneasily.

Forcing back tears, Nanny stood abruptly and said, "I volunteer to pilot Allura's Lion!"

Shocked, all eyes turned to her. The dead calm and determination on her face quelled all immediate protest. She looked at each of them in turn and said quietly, "You know it's the only way. We need Coran to stay here to help coordinate our attack, and besides, I want to strike a blow at Lotor!"

Hunk smiled and thought to himself, "Who'd ever have imagined . . . ?"

"But, Elizabeth, you don't know how to fly!" Coran exclaimed.

"The Lion does have flight-assist capabilities?" she demanded.

"Well, yes, but only to an extent . . ." he stammered.

"Well, then, it will just have to do!" she proclaimed, striking her fist on a table.

Coran opened his mouth to object once more, but Nanny suddenly had a dangerous look about her that caused him to close it hastily.

"At the moment there is no other choice," Keith agreed solemnly. Nanny's eyes lit up. "We will be near to guide her, and once we form Voltron, her controls will be integrated with the Black Lion's."

After a pause, Coran took a deep breath. "Very well. Good luck and Godspeed, Voltron Force!" The newly mended team turned and ran to their respective portals. After passing through, each was carried swiftly to an awaiting Lion.

Nanny entered the Blue Lion dressed in a white and yellow flight suit and yellow helmet. The chair in which she had traveled moved up and clicked into place at the ship's

control panel located in the head of the Lion. She inserted the ignition key into its designated slot, and instantly it slid into position. The Blue Lion powered up with an exhilarating hum. She looked at the instruments, felt momentary panic, and gripped the arms of her chair.

"No!" she scolded herself, "I can do this! For my Allura's sake!"

Just then Keith appeared on her forward view screen. “All right, Nanny, just relax. The Lion will pretty much fly itself. Switch to Depart Sequence.” A blue light flashed. She pushed the button beneath it. The Blue Lion’s engine noise rose in pitch. Another light flashed, indicating “all ready”.

“Okay. Now push forward slowly on the accelerator; the stick on your left,” Keith said. Nanny did as he instructed. The Lion swiftly left its moorings and shot up through the depths of the castle’s nearby lake. The force of the ascent pushed her back into her seat with a startled cry.

“It’s all right, Nanny! You’re doing fine!” came Keith’s steady voice. The Lion burst out of the water with an explosion of spray and climbed quickly into the stormy sky. “Pull back slightly on the accelerator, and push forward on the bar at your right until it clicks into the middle position. This will level you off,” Keith said patiently. Nanny did so. Her ship’s nose pitched down smoothly.

“Man, Nanny! You’re a natural!” came Hunk’s enthusiastic voice.

“Yeah! Let’s hear it for Nanny!” Lance cried.

She looked out of her view ports and saw the team flying alongside her in their own Lions. A smile spread across her face.

“Okay, gang! Let’s form Voltron!” Keith directed.

“Let’s go, Voltron Force!” the team cried out in unison.

Instantly, all five ships were caught up in an electrical field that pulled them close together. One by one the Lions transformed into the various parts of Voltron’s body. Keith formed the head and torso, Lance and Pidge the arms. Hunk and Nanny formed Voltron’s legs and feet. The robot brought his arms together with a reverberating clang and formed the Blazing Sword. The electromagnetic field vanished, and Voltron, Defender of the Universe, turned toward the castle.

The robeast until now had been focusing its bombardment on the castle. It detected Voltron and ceased fire. It turned toward them, kicked on its thrusters, and moved forward, growling menacingly.

“Geez, that thing is big!” Lance said in awe.

“And ugly!” Pidge added.

“Well, I’ve yet to see one that was aesthetically pleasing,” Keith answered. “Let’s make short work of it, team! We need to go after the princess!”

“Right!” the rest responded.

“Closing at four hundred meters,” Keith called.

Holding his sword out with both hands, Voltron rapidly approached the robeast. Lightning bolts increased around the robeast's head. It bent forward, pointing its horns

toward them, and released the energy from the lightning in a single blinding flash. The bolt cut through the cool night air and hit Voltron squarely in the chest. Voltron's arms flew apart, disengaging the Blazing Sword, which disappeared with a loud, crackling pop. Energy coursed through Voltron's circuitry. Everyone screamed as the robot careened backward toward the ground.

“Stabilizers! Full power!” Keith shouted.

“Nanny!” Hunk called. “On my mark! Three! Two! One! Engage!”

Nanny's board lit up above a row of switches. She flipped all of them up. There was a tooth-rattling shudder as Voltron's descent gradually slowed. They landed hard on the ground but were still on their feet.

Before they could react, the robeast landed right in front of them, the force of its weight shaking the ground like an earthquake. It flung its four arms around Voltron, lifted him up, and began to squeeze. With arms pinned, Voltron was momentarily helpless. Keith had a good view into the thing's mouth, its constant screams fogging his view port.

“I'm open to any ideas!” he shouted.

In a panic Nanny pushed forward on a control stick at her left, hoping that somehow something she did would work. Her Lion, which was Voltron's right leg, shot forward, kicking the robeast hard just above its left knee. It staggered, lost its balance, and fell, taking Voltron down with it. The team screamed as they went down, the force of the impact jarring their assailant loose. Voltron quickly rolled away.

“Good thinking, Nanny!” Keith commended.

The robeast leapt up like a titanic frog and grappled with them again.

“It gives us no time to react!” Hunk said in exasperation.

While standing on Voltron's feet, the robeast pummeled Voltron's head with two fists while it pulled on his arms with the other two.

“It's trying to tear us apart!” Pidge yelled.

“It's now or nothing, Nanny!” Hunk called.

Together they fired thrusters and took to the air with the robeast. Voltron leaned backward at a forty-five degree angle, bent his legs, and placed his feet on the robeast's stomach. Hunk and Nanny fired missiles into the robeast's face. It howled and loosened its grip. Voltron pushed with both legs and tore away from its grasp. The robeast bowed its head and prepared to fire again.

“Form Blazing Star!” Keith cried.

A glowing star shape formed on Voltron's chest and launched through the air, slicing toward their mammoth adversary. The robeast lurched to the left, trying to dodge the molten projectile, but wasn't fast enough. The star sliced both of its right arms off. Shrieking in rage and pain, the robeast backed off momentarily. The star returned to Voltron's chest. At that moment the robeast fired all its weapons simultaneously.

“Stratos jump!” Keith shouted.

Voltron shot up into the air to avoid the strike. Half the bombardment missed; however, the lightning blast from its horns and remaining missiles slammed into Voltron's head and legs. At the last second, Hunk swung his Lion in front of Nanny's, blocking

most of the onslaught. Metal tore violently, sending deadly debris everywhere. In a blaze of flames and choking smoke, Voltron plummeted from the sky and crashed into a deep ravine.

“Captain! Keith! Do you read?!” Lance cried. “Hunk, can you hear me?! Respond, please!” Static was the only sound.

Then, faintly, Hunk's weak voice came over the system. “I'm here . . . barely.”

“Keith! Keith!” Pidge called. Nothing. “I don't know if he made it,” he said hesitantly.

“Look!” Nanny cried.

From their view screens the team could see the robeast hovering above them, channeling electrical charges from the storm that raged above.

It was laughing at them.

“Form Blazing Sword!” Lance called desperately.

Nothing happened. With the severe damage to the Black Lion, Voltron's brain had ceased to function. They lay paralyzed in the darkness under a torrent of rain that had begun to fall, awaiting the merciless wrath of the robeast.

* * * *

Sounds.

A low-pitched hum.

At intervals, soft electronic beeps.

A constant rush of cool air.

Slowly Allura's eyes opened. Unfocused streaks of light were shooting past. She closed her eyes and settled deeper against the soft surface upon which she leaned, rising and falling slightly with its movement. Something heavy and warm lay over her body. She was very comfortable and soon drifted back to sleep.

After a time, her sleepy eyes opened again. Stretching out before her was a shimmering, swirling shape turning slowly in the darkness beyond. She watched it for a long time.

She sighed. A pressure about her shoulders tightened, and a voice whispered her name.

That voice.

She frowned.

Slowly images began tumbling in her mind.

A violent storm, the blowing canopy of her bed, a feeling of sudden terror as a figure in silhouette reached down toward her! The memory of an iron embrace, heavy chemical odor, frantic suffocation, and then the dizzy spin into oblivion!

Her body jerked with realization. She looked up and saw a familiar face smiling down at her.

She blinked. "Lotor!" she exclaimed. "Where are we?!"

His smile grew wider. "Why, aboard my star fighter, my lovely!"

She looked out the forward view port again. The outer rim of the Diamond galaxy, her home galaxy, was plainly in sight. Certain constellations, distorted but still

recognizable, told her that they had traveled light years from Arus and were nearing Lotor's homeworld.

Furious, she turned back to him. "You turn this ship around and take me back to Arus at once!"

His expression turned into a look of hurt. "What? And ruin my long-awaited homecoming? I'm sorry, my sweet, but that I will never do! You belong to me now."

She moved to slap the irritating smirk off his face but discovered that her wrists were bound in front of her!

"A necessary precaution, my love," he said with amusement.

Her face turned red with anger. "I will never marry you! You can't force me to marry you! I'll escape somehow!" She squirmed in an effort to get off his lap.

"You may as well relax, Allura," Lotor said, pulling her closer. "There is nowhere to go in a one-man fighter."

"Let go of me!" she said hotly.

Lotor turned her face toward his and said seriously, "You do not seem to grasp your position. You are my bride. Why, even now final preparations are being made for our arrival on Planet Doom."

Allura swallowed hard, "Voltron will follow and spoil your plans! Even now they are probably leaving Arus's space. . ."

"No, my dear," he interrupted, a mischievous gleam in his catlike eyes. "Your beloved Voltron Force is by now fighting for their lives against Hagggar's deadliest creation!" he laughed. "It must be a funny sight! Your Voltron hopping around on one leg, trying to fend off a robeast!" He was laughing harder now.

Tears of frustration rose to her eyes, and she quickly turned her face away from him. She stared out of the cockpit, biting her lower lip. The unpleasant image of Zarkon's face flashed in her mind. "What about your father? Do you really believe he will allow you to marry me?"

The merriment on Lotor's face drained away instantly. "What do you mean?!" he demanded.

When she didn't immediately answer, he roughly turned her to face him, their faces inches apart.

She could see danger in his eyes; nevertheless she said fearlessly, "During his first attack on my planet, he vowed to make me his personal slave. I don't think he has forgotten that."

Lotor's grip on her shoulders tightened, causing her to wince. "He promised you to me! No one will take you from me! Get used to the idea that I am to be your husband and that Planet Doom is your new home!" he finished harshly.

In the tense silence that followed, he saw that he was hurting her and let go abruptly. Her eyes remained fixed on his, suddenly making him feel uncomfortable.

Just then a high-pitched beep announced their proximity to Doom, and they both looked out the forward view screen.

Slowly a dim green speck enlarged before them, and as Lotor's ship drew ever closer, Allura's heart froze at what she saw. In the Drulean Empire's early days, careless misuse of Doom's scant natural resources had exhausted the planet and turned it into its present state: ravaged and lifeless. Allura knew that, if Zarkon were to conquer Arus, its fate would be the same. She gazed out at the barren landscape, broken here and there by tall, hornlike mountains. Rivers of swirling dust obscured their bases and drained into bottomless crevasses resembling terrible scars that would never heal.

Suddenly a sharp crackle came over the radio, and a low, grating voice said, "Welcome home, Prince Lotor! Your arrival has been eagerly awaited! Follow Vector Seven, Mark Two, to Landing Platform Delta."

"Acknowledged," Lotor replied briskly.

He took control of the fighter and guided it toward Castle Doom.

Allura began to shiver despite the heavy cloak wrapped around her; unconsciously she leaned back against him.

Lotor breathed in the sweetness of her soft hair and felt momentary elation as he imagined the waiting fanfare and reception. He had finally returned home from Arus

victorious!

Suddenly Allura turned and looked at him desperately. "Lotor! Please take me back before it is too late! I cannot face your father!" she cried.

His face darkened. "I will hear of no such thing, my Queen," he said with finality.

After a pause, she slowly turned away from him. "So . . . you do not truly love me as you claim," she whispered hopelessly.

His face twitched as if he'd been slapped and for once he had nothing to say.

"*Love never forces itself,*" echoed in his mind. It was the voice of his mother, who had died long ago.

"Hmph! That was nonsense," he thought consolingly to himself. "I take what I want! It is my right!"

They rounded a steep cliff and skimmed over an ancient lake bed.

Straight ahead stood Castle Doom, dark and threatening. It loomed over the surrounding landscape like a hideously overgrown tree, its towers snaking up into the starlit sky. Pinpoints of greenish light speckled the colossal structure.

Lotor's grip on the flight controls tightened, his jaw muscles working constantly beneath his pale blue skin, as a whirlwind of chaotic thoughts suddenly flew through his mind.

"She can't be right! No one, not even my father, would dare to oppose me! I have conquered countless worlds in his name! What is one woman to him?"

A sudden vision of Allura vanishing from his side flashed in his mind. "No! That will not happen! I will be near her always!"

He curled his left arm tightly around her. She did not resist. She had retreated deep within herself in an effort to gather much-needed strength.

Lotor's plane rapidly descended toward the landing platform, kicking up a cloud of dust and debris.

After a flawless landing, Lotor cut the power to the engines and opened the canopy. Outside, an entourage consisting of an ambassador, guards, and slaves made their way quickly to attend their prince.

Lotor looked down at Allura. Her eyes were still closed and her body was tense.

"Come, my sweet," he said, shaking her gently, "Your new kingdom awaits."

As he helped her to stand, a strong breeze swept around them, its acrid odor assaulting her senses, causing her eyes to water and her nose to itch. Lotor and the others seemed unaffected.

The group below saluted and cried, "Hail, Lotor, Crown Prince of Doom!"

Lotor looked down at them with satisfaction. He turned to Allura, noting her discomfort, and sliced the strap around her wrists with a small knife. She immediately covered her nose and mouth with the hem of her cloak. He caught her up in his arms, stepped down from the plane, and set her gently on her feet.

The ambassador stepped forward and bowed respectfully. Like all full-blooded Druleans, he was bald, with pointed ears, dark blue skin, needle-sharp teeth, and bloodshot,

reptilian eyes. Heavyset and short, he wore a long crimson robe with a thick gold chain around his ample waist. "Your father awaits you in the royal throne room, my Prince."

Lotor nodded. "Send word that we will arrive shortly, after we have been refreshed."

The ambassador bowed again and hurried back to the castle.

Lotor's attention then focused on the four human slave women who stood quietly nearby. "Attend her!" he commanded.

They quickly surrounded Allura, their sandaled feet making soft clicking noises, and guided her to a nearby ready room.

Each of the women wore a simple sleeveless dress of a dreary gray color that reached just below the knee. Their hair, of varying shades of brown, was bound up neatly at the base of the neck. They wore no jewelry save for a metallic collar around the throat that had a single red stone set into the center. This "jewel" was called the "eye of Doom" and would deliver an agonizing shock to its wearer if she ventured too close to the castle's outer boundaries. Allura looked on them with pity and wondered what conquered world had been forced to give them up.

Lotor followed soon after, accompanied by two of his six guards, and entered a separate room.

Allura, after taking care of immediate needs, was helped to undress. From a wardrobe a beautiful silken gown of midnight blue was brought and

slipped over her head. The fabric spilled to the floor in a cascade of shimmering night. The low-cut, intricate bodice was very form fitting, with long sleeves that ended in points below the wrists. The waist was slung low, the skirt ending in a hem that touched the floor in front and tapered off behind her in a short train.

The princess felt very self-conscious in the clinging material and wished for her modest wardrobe at home. She could just see Nanny and Coran's expressions!

She stepped into matching slippers that were placed before her.

One of the slave women brought a chair for her to sit in and proceeded to arrange her hair.

No makeup was needed save for a lightly tinted lipstick, as her naturally dark lashes, brows, and unblemished complexion were quite perfect.

Finally a tiara, necklace, and bracelet of Olarian diamonds completed her attire.

She stood.

"This way, Your Highness," one of the women said, motioning to the door.

Allura took a deep breath and followed her outside.

Lotor, who had been leaning impatiently against a pillar, turned when he heard the door to Allura's room open.

His jaw dropped in amazement when he saw her. Already stunning in his eyes, she was even more so in the gown he had had made for her. Only in his dreams had she looked so seductive. The color of the satiny material contrasted well with her ivory skin and enhanced her beautiful eyes.

Her eyes . . . tinged with sadness.

He quickly brushed the thought away as he focused on her golden hair. It was partially put up, with the rest spilling down in soft curls to the small of her back.

He was also very pleased with his selection of jewelry for her. Only the finest and rarest for her!

As he reveled in his thoughts, she stared back at him.

He had changed out of his gray uniform of earlier into a suit of dress battle armor.

Glinting in the starlight, his imposing form was elegant and powerful. Over the armor he wore a black tunic belted at the waist. A long black cape fell to his ankles. His hair, neatly groomed, framed his handsome, pale blue face and fell down his back like a river of silvery moonlight.

Suddenly, she realized that he was aware of her gaze and, blushing furiously, quickly averted her eyes, hoping to hide the attraction she was feeling.

He smiled knowingly. "Come, my beauty! My father awaits!"

He spun on his heel and preceded the group.

The guards surrounded Allura, three on each side, and marched her swiftly behind him. The slave women brought up the rear, one behind the other.

The group crossed the platform and boarded a ground transport that quickly shuttled them to the massive gates of the castle. They disembarked and proceeded through the portal.

A crowd of common Druleans cheered and shouted as they marched past.

Allura glanced at them and felt very alone. She fought to keep her composure, thinking that this must be the worst day of her life.

Just ahead stood the doors to the royal throne room.

Roughly two stories tall, hewn from solid obsidian and highly polished, they stood like huge black mirrors reflecting the party's approach. Silently, by some unseen signal, the doors swung apart, releasing a shimmering amber light from within.

Lotor was the first to step across the threshold, instantly causing a titanic roar of cheers that echoed into the night.

As Allura passed through, she prayed for strength from her father.

As she came into the enormous room, the cheering ceased with a long, collective gasp from the onlookers. Not since Lotor's mother had one so fair graced the throne room. Reptilian eyes stared in awe over gaping mouths. It was as if a small, fiery blue star had suddenly landed in their midst.

The court bowed and parted, allowing the party to pass on to the royal dais.

Allura could see the figure of King Zarkon seated high above.

Zarkon surveyed the approaching group coolly. He smirked as he watched his son strutting at its head, puffed up like an Arusian rooster. Behind Lotor he could see the slim figure of a fair-haired girl, the crown princess of Arus. The smirk stretched into a grin as he watched his prophecy of long ago come true.

As they reached the steps of the dais, Zarkon rose and looked down on them. An imposing figure, he stood a full seven feet in height. His body, well knit with thick, cordlike muscles, was covered regally in long purple robes. A heavy, fur-lined cloak hung from his massive shoulders, and encircling his hairless head was a crown of gold spikes that stabbed upward into the air. In his left hand was the Imperial Staff of Doom, an obsidian shaft topped with a large, glowing stone that threw an eerie red light across his face.

He descended slowly toward the awaiting party. The crowd of courtiers fell into hushed whispers as the king stepped onto the floor and drew near.

"So, my son, I see you have finally captured the jewel of Arus!"

Lotor bowed. "Yes, Father! My conquest is nearing its end!" He looked up, eager for his father's approval, but Zarkon's eyes were fixed greedily upon Allura.

She shrank away from him.

Lotor began to feel uneasy as an expectant silence fell.

He straightened and moved backward, reaching for the princess with his hand. She took it and moved close to him as Zarkon continued his advance.

Allura could see his face clearly now. His large-boned features were covered with leathery blue skin etched with deep lines. He had large, webbed ears that reminded her of a bat's wings stretched out in flight. Below his prominent nose were thick lips that parted to reveal many sharp teeth. Beneath his heavy, arched eyebrows, cruel, bloodshot eyes focused

on her face, then dropped down as he examined her form. She suddenly felt naked in front of him and tried to move further behind Lotor.

"Well done, well done," Zarkon murmured, moving closer.

Lotor tensed.

Like a bolt of lightning the king's hand shot forward and wrenched Allura from Lotor's grasp. Turning, Zarkon flung her into the waiting arms of a guard behind him.

Lotor's eyes widened in disbelief; with a practiced, fluid motion he brought his laser sword to life even as his own guards trained their weapons on him.

Soon three disemboweled bodies fell to the floor.

Allura struggled to get free but was no match for the Drulean, who had the strength of three human men.

With a dull crack a guard struck Lotor on the back of the head with the butt of his rifle. The prince fell to his knees, stunned, and was quickly disarmed and manacled. One of the guards, whose brother had just been killed, began kicking Lotor savagely in the ribs and face.

"No!" Allura cried.

"Enough!" Zarkon commanded. "Stand him up."

Lotor was pulled roughly to his feet.

Coughing up blood between ragged gasps, he struggled to remain conscious. Straining through the fog of his vision, he could see a blurred double image of Allura. Her terrified eyes blinked back at him as her mouth framed soundless words. Then the towering shape of his father blotted her out as he stepped forward.

"I must thank you for your most generous gift!" he said. "She will not only provide me with much pleasure, but later with a new heir as well!" He laughed cruelly.

It was too much. Lotor's mind was overloaded by what had just transpired. He lunged murderously for his father but fell unconscious at the dark king's feet.

Zarkon's booming laughter echoed throughout the cavernous hall as he turned toward Allura.

Allura sat down stiffly in the chair put before her.

She had been taken to some sort of viewing room.

In a daze she tried to piece together what had just happened. Lotor had been betrayed, beaten, and taken away, his fate unknown.

Why hadn't he believed her? She had tried to warn him! She forced back sudden tears. How could she ever escape? Would the Voltron Force come? And what of them? Had they been harmed?

Just then, Zarkon came into the room, striding up to her with an ugly smile on his face. "Well, my dear, it would seem that your future has changed. You are now my slave . . .

my personal slave," he added meaningfully. "Of course your attire shall reflect your station. The less the better, I should think."

She narrowed her eyes at him in disgust.

"First, however, I have something for you to see."

He turned to the wall opposite her. "Open the view port!" he commanded.

Instantly a panel in front of them slid up, revealing a large screen.

The image of Doom's desolate landscape came into view. Allura could see the infamous Pit of Skulls, a gaping hole into which anyone who gained the royal family's displeasure was thrown.

The image magnified.

Seven figures stood at the edge.

She inhaled sharply. One was Lotor! He was on his knees, all clothing removed except his pants. His bare back was bruised and cut. Evidently the guards hadn't quite finished with him in the throne room. His face was turned toward the ground, his long, bedraggled hair brushing the dusty earth. One guard stood over him, brandishing a large club.

Zarkon laughed softly to himself, then said, "This is your end, my son; any last words?"

Outside, Lotor looked up at the cam-bot that hovered above him, projecting his image to the castle. He could see his father and, farther back, Allura staring back at him on the machine's small view screen. His swollen face quivered with rage, and he spat out a stream of dark

blood. “You’ll regret this, Father!” he growled. Then his eyes fixed on Allura, and his expression softened. “I should have listened to you! You deserve better than that bastard!”

“Lotor . . .” she whispered.

Just then, the guard who stood over Lotor brought his club crashing down onto the prince’s already bruised skull, causing him to cry out in agony and fall forward into the dirt.

“That will be the end of your disrespect!” Zarkon hissed.

Lotor turned his face upward and said weakly, “I have conquered worlds for you . . . she was mine. . .”

Zarkon’s eyes narrowed. “You were a means to an end!” he replied coldly, “Put him in!”

Allura leaped up from her chair and grabbed Zarkon’s arm. “No! He is your own son! Don’t do this!”

The king turned on her without warning, twisting his arm from her grasp, and brought his hand crashing across her face violently. Her head snapped to one side, flinging the tiara across the room and she fell to the stone floor.

Allura lay face down, stunned, aware only of throbbing pain and a taste of blood in her mouth.

Outside, Lotor, witnessing his father’s brutality, shook with helpless rage as the guards around him laughed.

Darkness encroached on the edges of Allura’s vision, and she felt sick and dizzy. “No! Don’t pass out!” she screamed inwardly, “Fight it! Get up!”

Shakily she pushed herself up to her knees, sat back and slowly brought a trembling hand to her sore cheek.

Zarkon loomed over her, his upper lip curled back in anger. “Challenge me again, and you will suffer severe consequences!”

He reached down and pulled her roughly to her feet.

Loss of consciousness threatened again as a sudden rush of blood went to her head, causing her to swoon.

Zarkon swiftly caught her from falling backward and held her tightly against him. He looked down on her, her face, throat, and exposed cleavage. He desired her badly. “I shall teach you proper respect in due time!” he breathed, placing her back in her chair.

Turning back to the screen, he signaled the guards outside, who grabbed Lotor's arms and forced him toward the edge of the pit.

With every ounce of his strength Lotor struggled against them. He threw his father one last vengeful glance, then fell over the edge; body twisting, legs churning, fingers clawing the darkness; then disappeared.

Allura covered her eyes, trying to block out the scene she had just witnessed.

"You . . . you've killed your own son!" she said in disbelief.

"His mother's son!" Zarkon shot back. "He became soft like her! Useless!"

He paused. "There is one more item that we must attend to," he said, his voice very near. Fearfully she looked up at him. The screen flickered and showed a new image.

Voltron's twisted and broken body appeared, lying motionless at the bottom of a deep ravine. Black smoke curled upward into a leaden sky.

"No!" Allura gasped, her hand flying to her mouth.

"There is more," Zarkon smiled.

The picture changed and showed the Castle of Lions.

Coran was standing outside, his arms over his head in a gesture of surrender, a fleet of Drulean warships flying overhead.

"It can't be!" Allura cried.

"As you can see," Zarkon laughed, his arm sweeping toward the screen, "Voltron is defeated, and your planet has surrendered. Arus is mine."

Tears flowed freely down the princess's face.

Slowly he began circling her chair, smiling sadistically. "Your beloved Voltron Force is dead. It was foolish even to think that my newest robeast could be destroyed. You humans are no match for Drulean strategy and technology. The entire population of Arus will be enslaved, and your planet's resources will be fully exploited to enrich our own."

Allura's shoulders shook with wracking sobs.

The king stopped and stared down at her. His attempt to break her spirit was working. She had no way of knowing that the images he had shown her were not entirely true. With a little magical help from Witch Haggar, he had managed to stretch the truth.

No matter, it would come to pass soon enough!

“One final word before I leave you, my concubine,” he said, cupping her chin in his hand. “There are certain rituals that I must perform to satisfy Drulean custom before taking the woman who will eventually bear me a son. You, being that woman, will be sealed within the apartments Lotor had prepared for you for three days to await me.”

He let go of her and stepped back, a look of smug satisfaction on his face. “I am much looking forward to our union!”

He turned and motioned to a guard at the door. “Take her away.”

With numbness invading the core of her being, Allura bowed her head in despair.