

Betrayal of Doom by catwoman
Part 3

Author's Chapter Notes:

Sexual Content: intense near-rape scene. Violence. Character Death: keep reading to the end of part 4...

Voltron's broken body lay at the rocky bottom of a narrow ravine, a river of mud coursing around the fallen hero as the storm worsened.

Hovering high above, the victorious robeast eyed its prey cautiously. One strike at the middle of the motionless body should blow it apart. Then it would be easy to pry the small human pilots out and eat them!

The robeast drooled with anticipation. It arched its back, looking up into the tumultuous sky, and began to draw the energy of the lightning one last time.

Down below, Nanny, Lance, Pidge, and Hunk could only watch in helpless horror as the robeast prepared its final strike.

"Alfor protect us!" Nanny whispered.

Suddenly a blinding flash of light tore through the air above, engulfing the robeast. It screamed and writhed in disbelief as this new attack charred its body. The blast seared its flesh away until all that was left were smoldering metal components that fell to the ground as the titanic beam of electricity abruptly vanished.

All that remained was a faint column of sulfurous smoke that soon dissipated in the cool morning air. The team gazed upward in stunned silence. Was it all over?

Then a calm, clear voice came over their intercoms. "Voltron Force! Is everyone all right?" It was Coran, back at the castle!

After a moment of relief, Lance called back, "Hunk is hurt pretty bad, and we've had no response from Keith since Voltron took that hit in the head! The rest of us are okay, but we need help fast!"

"Stand by, Lance, I have a med team en route!" Coran replied immediately.

"Thanks! Lance out!"

The violent storm was now only a memory as the early morning sun shed its golden light upon the ravaged countryside.

High above the ravine, concealed among the misty forest foliage, Witch Haggar, accompanied by her cat, watched the rescue operation that was now in progress.

Two of the Voltron Force members were carried to a waiting hover transport as a third, the woman who had piloted Princess Allura's Blue Lion, climbed up front with the driver.

With a high-pitched hum, the boxy craft rose from the ground and sped off in the direction of the castle.

Moments later a low, rumbling sound signaled the advance of four towering anti-gravity cranes on their way to salvage the crippled robot.

The remaining two VF pilots stayed behind to supervise the operation.

Haggar ground her teeth in frustration. Who would have thought that that old fool Coran would figure out a way to harness the destructive force of the storm and use it against the robeast? She had watched in amazement as lightning was drawn to a radar dish at the base of the castle's main tower and reflected back at her champion!

There would be hell to pay when Zarkon discovered that Voltron wasn't completely destroyed!

All was not lost, however. She had helped Prince Lotor capture the princess, and by now he should be presenting his bride to his father.

A twisted smile contorted her dark, craggy features as she reached down to pick up her dark blue companion. "Zarkon will see," she said, stroking her pet. "Arus will be an easy victory. There's no way that Voltron can be repaired before our battle fleet arrives! And even if he is, from the look of those two injured pilots I doubt that two qualified replacements could be found in so little time!" Her high-pitched laughter echoed up into the trees, causing the singing birds to fall silent.

Pulling the hood of her cloak close about her face, she turned and picked her way back to her hidden transport.

She cleared away the brush she had used as cover, revealing an oblong canister in the shape of a Drulean coffin. Haggar raised the lid and climbed inside. Once she was flat on her back on the cushioned bottom with Kitty curled up at her feet, the lid clicked shut. She powered up the single engine, left the forest floor, cleared the trees, and punched the accelerator. The craft shot upward like a dart into the atmosphere and out into space on a course for Planet Doom.

Hunk and Keith lay in their beds in the castle's medical center.

Nanny had changed back into her usual attire and stood next to Coran, watching as the lead physician, Dr. Jack Sardis, ran diagnostics on Keith's still form.

The youth's dark hair had been smoothed away from his ashen face, exposing a long, ugly gash running across his forehead.

Nanny dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief as a nurse gently sponged away dried blood from the wound.

"How is he, Jack?" Coran asked.

The fair-haired doctor turned and looked at them gravely. "I have just completed a brain scan. There is a fracture of the frontal bone and some swelling. I've done what I can to alleviate the pressure. . . all we can do now is wait."

As their tormented expressions intensified, the doctor's pale blue eyes softened, and he stepped closer, resting a hand on each of their shoulders. "He is both young and strong. I believe he has every chance of pulling through."

"Thank you," Coran said quietly.

Nearby, Hunk coughed weakly and said, "Keith's stronger than the lot of us put together! He'll be all right . . . Don't worry. . . ." Gasping and grimacing, he fell back to his pillow, clutching his ribs. "Don't try to talk, Hunk," Dr. Sardis said. "You must rest and allow those broken ribs to heal."

Hunk managed an exhausted smile.

"Come, Elizabeth," Coran said as he guided her to the door. "We'll check on them later. You need some rest."

Seeing the logic in his suggestion, she turned to leave, throwing one last look at Keith and Hunk, then left the doctor and nurse to do their work.

With heavy hearts Coran and Nanny walked to the end of the hall to a sitting area opposite an enormous window.

The midmorning sun shone brightly from a clear blue sky.

Coran motioned toward a low couch into which Nanny sank gratefully. He sat down wearily beside her, and for a time they just stared at the outside world that continued in its rhythm oblivious to the tragedies that had befallen their own.

Coran bent forward, burying his fingers in his wavy red hair, and closed his eyes. Silently, he berated himself for allowing the princess to be snatched from right under their noses. How could he have been so blind?

He groaned softly.

“I know what you are thinking,” a quiet voice said.

Snapping out of his reverie, he found Nanny’s solemn eyes fixed on him. “Do not blame yourself,” she continued. “Haggar’s magic seems to be more powerful than it ever was. Somehow, she or one of her spies entered the castle and disarmed our defense system. That’s why no alarm was raised when Lotor breached the castle . . .”

“I know, Elizabeth, I know. But King Alfor entrusted me with Allura’s safety! I have allowed her to fall into Zarkon’s hands . . .” he choked and could not finish.

Tenderly, Nanny put her arm around her friend’s shoulder as he wept, and blinked back tears of her own.

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Two burly palace guards escorted Princess Allura swiftly through the dimly lit, labyrinthine passages of Castle Doom, their rapid footsteps echoing loudly in the seemingly deserted corridors.

As they walked, Allura scanned her surroundings for any possible route of escape. There were none, no windows; or doors, for that matter. If there were ways out, they were well hidden.

After what seemed like miles of walking, the group stepped onto a turbo-lift that carried them up into one of the castle’s towers. Allura shifted uncomfortably under the glassy, unblinking stares of the guards.

Finally the lift came to a stop, allowing them to disembark and walk the last few meters to a set of ornately wrought golden doors.

As one guard pressed a switch on his left, the doors swung inward. The other guard placed his hand on Allura’s back and roughly pushed her into the room, almost causing her to fall.

“Your apartments,” he said gruffly, then pulled the doors shut, sealing her in with a reverberating slam.

She ran back to the doors and listened intently. She could hear nothing. She waited a moment and then tried to open them, but there was no knob, and no switch could be seen. Frantically, her trembling hands ran along the cold, hard surface but to no avail. She turned to find another way out and was stunned by the opulence of her prison’s interior.

The highly polished floor, walls, and vaulted ceiling were hewn from stone, dark blue in color. Their surfaces glimmered in the ruddy light of crystal orbs that hung from the ceiling's spine.

At the far end of the cavernous room, facing the doors, stood a magnificent bed covered with a silvery silken spread and pillows. Surrounding the bed on three sides were voluminous draperies of blue velvet, and sitting on the floor at the bed's foot was a silver urn filled with white roses that spilled over the edge and onto the floor in a cascade of petals and leaves.

To the right of the bed was a hallway. She walked quickly to it to see what lay beyond.

To her right was a dressing room and, further back, a bathroom. To her left was . . . an outdoor balcony!

Allura rushed outside, across the patio, and to the railing. She looked eagerly over the edge and instantly lost all hope of escape.

Far, far below, lay the harsh, Drulean landscape. It must have been at least a mile down.

A ghostly layer of thick green mist swirled around the base of the castle, covering the ground as far as the eye could see.

"Most of Doom's pungent odor must be contained in that low-lying fog," she thought as she breathed the inoffensive air around her.

She turned and looked upward; the tower's top tapered off into a point high above, its smooth outer surface affording no way to climb up or down.

She stood for a time looking at the starlit sky, wondering what had become of her home and her friends. Feeling a pang of sorrow, she slowly turned and went back inside.

Standing like a silent sentry just inside her dressing room was a large wardrobe. She opened it and was amazed by its contents.

Sparkling back at her were the most beautiful gowns she had ever seen. Long, flowing, exotic materials of infinite colors hung gracefully waiting to be worn. There were drawers containing intimate apparel, and a shelf with a variety of shoes.

She shut the door and went into her bathroom.

It was an oval-shaped room of the same highly polished blue stone glowing softly in the light of prismatic sconces which were placed at intervals around the chamber. The room contained a sink, a private toilet, and at the end of the chamber, sunk into the floor, a large rectangular tub, a continuous supply of warm water spilling into it. A small dressing table with mirror and chair stood nearby.

She went over to the sink and looked at her reflection in the mirror.

Framed by her tousled hair, her wan face looked back at her, her eyes betraying her breaking heart. Upon her cheek was the evidence of Zarkon's ferocity, a painful bruise that had become swollen and purple.

She ran cold water over a washcloth and applied it gingerly to the throbbing contusion. As she stood there, she noticed that the creams and perfumes on the counter were those that she preferred to use at home. Lotor had made sure that she had all the things that she was accustomed to, if not more.

The image of Lotor being thrown into the Pit of Skulls flashed vividly in her mind; despite the fact that he had brought her here against her will, she felt sorry for him.

Lost in thought, she failed to hear the approach of a young slave girl who had brought a tray of fruits and meats for her. Startled, she turned away from the mirror to face her visitor.

The girl was about thirteen, slim, with soft russet hair and green eyes. Like all the other slaves Allura had seen, she wore a gray dress and the dreaded eye of Doom at her throat.

After setting the tray down at Allura's dressing table, the girl turned and said, "My name is Lira, and I have brought you food; you must be hungry."

And Allura was. It had been just over twenty-four hours since her last meal, but she hesitated.

Lira, seeing the princess's apprehension, quickly ate a few bites, smiled, and said, "It is safe, Your Highness. The galley slaves have all heard of you, and, believe me, the last thing any of us wishes is for you to be harmed!"

Allura was touched and smiled gratefully. "How did you come to be here?" Allura asked.

A flash of sadness crossed the girl's face. "My parents were slaves here. They escaped to the mountains. That's where I was born. But, when I was five, they were killed when some guards found us. I was brought back to the castle and have been serving here ever since."

How sad, Allura thought.

But then Lira's face brightened. "But I have heard stories of you, the Voltron Force, and of course Voltron! I always hoped that somehow you would rescue us!"

Allura's eyes became watery as she recalled the images of her defeated planet and the destroyed Voltron. "I wish I could, Lira, I truly wish . . ." she broke off with a sob.

Lira put her hand on Allura's arm. "I know you would if you could."

Allura tried valiantly to smile.

Lira looked at the tray. "Please try to eat."

After a moment Allura sat down and sampled some of the fare.

The girl's company and the meal helped lift her spirits considerably. When she was finished, she looked over at the steaming bath. "I could do with a bath, but I am afraid that I am being watched."

"Oh, you needn't worry about that, Your Highness! Prince Lotor saw to it that these rooms were completely sealed from prying eyes. He always said that his bride would need her privacy."

Good, Allura thought, the last person she wanted looking at her was Zarkon!

Just then a low chime was heard, and Lira jumped. "I must go! The overseers keep track of us. I must not linger!"

She rushed back to the room's entrance, Allura following. One door opened; two guards waited outside. Allura watched as Lira hurried out into the hallway, the door sealing shut once more. With a sigh she turned and went to take her bath.

Later that evening, wearing a kimono-style night gown she had selected from her wardrobe, Allura climbed into the expansive bed and sank down into the plush mattress. She pulled the comforter up to her chin and lay there for a time, studying her surroundings.

Soon a faint clicking noise made her rise up. At her right, sitting on a small table that was half hidden by folds of drapery, was a small timepiece. Upon closer inspection, she saw that it was keeping track of the passing days.

Feeling sick inside, she turned over and suddenly found herself crying.

"Oh, Father," she thought, "How will I ever get out of here?" She buried her face deeper in her pillow.

Zarkon's image moved silently among the shadows of her thoughts. In two more days she would be forced to submit to his will! She couldn't bear the thought! There must be a way to escape him! There must be!

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At the bottom of the Pit of Skulls, a figure lay motionless in the murky darkness.

After falling nearly five hundred feet to certain death, Lotor miraculously still lived.

He had lain there for nearly two days, and now the pain of his injuries slowly brought him back to consciousness. He became aware of his own shallow breathing and opened his eyes.

He lay on his back looking up into the shaft into which he had been pushed. As he lay there, he could see dim, ghostly shapes hanging at different levels high above. There was a tear in each of the gauzy sheets which vaguely registered in his mind as what had slowed his fall and saved his life.

As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he realized that his surroundings were illuminated by a faint, glowing, bluish light. This was caused by thick veins of phosphorous rock that laced through the dull granite walls of the pit.

Suddenly, with the force of a Drulean windstorm the recent events of the past came whipping through his mind.

He must get out of there and back to Castle Doom to rescue Allura!

He sat up quickly, feeling a sticky pull from the ground's surface. A stab of pain shot through his side, causing him to inhale sharply. As he gulped the rotting stink of the stagnant air, a wave of nausea rolled over him.

"My father and those guards will pay for this!" he seethed.

He supported himself with one hand, feeling it sink slightly into the gooey substance. Upon closer inspection he saw that the entire floor and part of the walls were covered with a coarse, rope-like matter.

He struggled to his feet.

The blows to his skull from the guards sent him staggering backward, holding his head in his hands. He steadied himself against a nearby wall until the pounding subsided.

As he leaned into it for support, he felt something hard against his shoulder. He turned to see what it was, but it was enshrouded in the sticky white threads. He pushed his hand through the stuff, feeling a rounded shape within. Slowly he pried it loose and brought it up to his face for a closer look.

It was a human skull! As he looked around he saw that the floor and walls were littered with numerous bony shapes.

While surveying this grisly graveyard, he became aware of a faint trembling throughout the cavern, and before he could react, an enormous cave spider charged out from a hole not ten feet away from him.

It was the size of an Terran elephant, with eight long, spiny legs and covered with short, grayish fur. It emitted a deafening hissing noise as it paused, searching for its prey.

Gripped by his instincts, Lotor turned and ran to the opposite side of the pit, fortunately finding a narrow passageway to slip into. The spider, feeling the vibrations from Lotor's running feet, followed swiftly in pursuit.

To his horror the spider forced its body through the cramped opening and sprang after him. Lotor continued to run, the spider gaining on him by the second. In desperation he threw himself against the wall to his right, burrowing as far in as he could between the shriveled bodies of the spider's previous victims.

The sudden ceasing of vibrations caused the spider to stop abruptly, probing the floor and walls for any sign of its prey.

Lotor realized that his carnivorous pursuer was blind, and he held his breath, hoping that

soon the monster would move on. The spider lingered, testing its threads in earnest, its dripping fangs clicking together hungrily.

It lifted one of its spear-tipped legs and stabbed the wall directly in front of Lotor's face, skewering the dried up corpse next to him. The crumbling body crackled sickeningly with the impact and Lotor squeezed his eyes shut fearing he was next. The spider extricated its leg and tried the wall a few feet ahead. After many tense moments, it slowly moved further on, shrieking in frustration. Lotor stayed where he was until he could no longer hear the beast's howls.

Very carefully he pulled away from the webbing. What was he to do? Certainly he could not climb back up out of the hole into which he had fallen. It was too steep!

He inhaled deeply in an effort to clear his mind and noticed that the stench of decay had lessened. Wait! There must be natural vents from the surface that supplied the cavern with air! If only he could find one!

And as if in answer, a faint breeze lightly touched his skin from the direction of the spider's retreat. It faded but after a moment renewed itself more strongly.

A wry smile spread across Lotor's face. "Great," he mused, "Hopefully I'll find that airshaft before that demon finds me!"

The Prince of Doom slowly followed the spider deeper into the tunnel.

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Back on Planet Arus the sun was setting on the second day since Allura's kidnapping.

Lance and Pidge made final preparations for their mission to Planet Doom. Their Lion ships fortunately had been spared major damage during the robeast attack and were soon ready for deep space flight.

Just before their departure, the two pilots stopped by the medical center to check on Keith and Hunk's recovery. Both were healing quickly, thanks to the attentive care of the doctor and his staff.

And as the sun sank slowly in the west, Nanny and Coran anxiously watched as the Red Lion, followed closely by the Green Lion, streaked low over the castle and climbed swiftly up into the darkening sky.

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Lotor had no idea how much time had passed since his narrow escape from the cave spider. It seemed like he had been creeping for hours in the spider's wake, looking for the source of outside air he had detected earlier.

He was drenched with sweat and had become very thirsty, his head and ribs aching constantly. His weary body screamed for rest, but the thought of his beloved Allura in his father's arms spurred him on mercilessly.

While contemplating his vengeance, he failed to see the sudden dip in the path's floor directly ahead of him. He took a step and found himself tumbling, his sharp cry of surprise ringing out into the silence. With a thud he landed flat on his face in the small depression. He lay there motionless, his heart pounding, waiting for the thunderous rumble of the giant spider.

Nothing happened, however, and he slowly rolled over onto his back.

High overhead, winking down at him from a small hole, was a brightly burning star.

Lotor brushed the hair away from his eyes and blinked in disbelief. Cool air caressed his body as it spilled to the floor from the opening.

The shaft! He got to his feet quickly and looked around for something to stand on, but there was nothing within sight that would aid him.

Well, I'll just have to run and jump, he decided.

Cautiously he retraced his footsteps back the way he had come until he was roughly thirty feet away. Taking a deep breath, he broke into a run toward the hole. At the edge of the dip he jumped, reaching for the ceiling, his fingers barely brushing the shaft's bottom. He landed hard on the other side, gasping for breath.

Behind him a huge bulge slowly formed on the tunnel's left side.

Hearing a muffled hissing sound, Lotor turned just in time to see the cave spider erupt from the wall where it had lain in wait.

He froze for an instant as the brute rushed toward him. "Run, you fool!" his mind screamed. With arms and legs pumping, Lotor ran back up the incline and launched his body at the shaft, his fingers digging deeply into the dirt at its base. He looked down and saw the spider rearing up, its two forelegs stabbing outward to impale him.

Clawing with all his might, he pulled himself up into the hole. Gasping in pain, he climbed up about ten feet and paused, trying to catch his breath.

Down below, the spider hadn't given up. It located the hole and thrust in one of its legs as far as it could. The razor-sharp tip grazed Lotor's right calf, causing him to yelp in painful surprise. Seized with a renewed burst of adrenaline, he scaled the remainder of the ascent and scrambled out of the shaft to safety.

Once outside he ran as fast as he could toward an outcropping of rock that peeked above the mist in the distance.

When he reached its shelter, he dropped to the sandy ground, exhausted, and soon fell into a dreamless sleep. Beyond the mountains, the first light of dawn slowly brightened.

Hours later, as Doom's sun was setting, the slow, rhythmic beat of a gigantic gong rudely awakened him. Now fully alert, he scrambled closer to the giant boulder that had given him refuge.

The vibrating pulse continued, drawing him out from behind the rock. Warily he looked back the way he had come and saw his father's castle far away in the distance, its dark surface shimmering with the eerie green glow of thousands of interior lights.

"My father's joining rituals are nearing their end!" Lotor hissed between clenched teeth. "I have precious little time!"

Just then something in his peripheral vision caught his attention. He looked to his left and saw, low on the darkening horizon, two falling stars, one red and one green. The two pinpoints of colored light skimmed above the rugged terrain and then seemed to begin to bounce in his direction.

Curiosity turned to recognition as Lotor realized that the approaching lights were Lions of Arus's Voltron Force!

Thundering across the dusty ground, Pidge and Lance raced toward Castle Doom.

Keeping to the shadows of an adjacent mountain range, they continued their approach, scanning their instruments for any sign of detection.

So far all had gone well. Before entering Doom's atmosphere, they had used their ship's tractor beams to cover themselves with asteroid fragments, thus appearing to be ordinary meteoroids. Once beneath the planet's defense grid, they had ejected their rocky cover and landed unseen.

"I've got the castle sighted dead ahead!" Pidge radioed to Lance. "There's a formation of rock three miles distant that should provide adequate cover."

"Roger that, Pidge," Lance called back.

Together the two warriors guided their Lion ships to their intended shelter.

Within minutes they had stopped at its base, set their crafts' engines on standby, and hurried on foot to a nearby boulder to observe the castle.

"Ugh! It stinks out here! And what is that noise?" Pidge asked of the incessant clanging.

"I'm not sure," Lance responded, squinting at the castle. "It can't be good, what ever it is!"

Suddenly, a swish of sand from behind caused them both to spin around, drawing their pistols. A tall figure, half-crouched in the shadows, was moving toward them.

"Identify yourself!" Lance commanded sharply.

Immediately a hoarse but familiar voice called out, "Don't shoot! It's me, Lotor!"

And as he moved out under the faint light of the stars, Pidge's and Lance's mouths dropped open in amazement.

Before them, tattered, bruised, and with a desperate gleam in his luminous eyes, the Crown Prince of Doom, their sworn enemy, asked for their help.

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Allura sat at her dressing table, clothed in a sleeveless gown of embroidered silk.

She was thankful to have this to wear, since during her bath that morning an old slave woman had crept in with orders to lock her wardrobe and had mistaken it for a towel lying on the floor near the tub. Apparently, Zarkon's wish for his captive's scant attire was being fulfilled.

Nervously, she set her brush down as the shaking vibration of a gong coursed through her body, driving home the fact that the eve of the third day had come and that soon King Zarkon would make his appearance.

Lira had visited her just minutes ago, bringing a flask of clear liquid and a glass. "This will make your night bearable. Please drink it," she urged, "It will allow your mind to escape, although your body must remain here!"

Allura had thanked her as she hurriedly left, and now sat alone, contemplating her fate. Feeling dead inside, she reached for the drink and slowly brought it to her lips. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back.

Without warning, a strong hand closed over hers, wrenching the drink away. Startled, she looked up. Zarkon's towering frame was bent over her, his face scowling.

"No, my dear! You will not shut me out tonight of all nights!" And he flung the glass across the room, shattering it against a wall.

She tried to pull away from him as he dragged her from her chair. "No! Leave me alone!" she shrieked, clawing at his arms through the sleeves of his robe.

He laughed, amused by her futile attempts to flee him, and swung her out into the darkened bedroom. "I have waited the allotted time, as is my custom," he said, pulling her to him, "and now, as I have foretold, I will make you mine!"

Wilting in the crush of his embrace, she squeezed her eyes shut and turned her face away, feeling his body growing hard against her. Clenching her teeth in revulsion, she strained with all her might to push away from him.

A low, rumbling growl issued from deep within his throat. At last he would satisfy his desire! Gripping her jaw with his hand, he turned her face up toward his, his fiery reptilian eyes burning into her own.

This girl's beauty is bewitching! Lotor was no fool to keep after her, he thought. And with that his open mouth covered hers, his long, muscular tongue forcing itself inside.

Repelled, Allura tried to scream. This couldn't be happening!

Zarkon broke away, leaving her gasping for air. He moved her backward a few steps until her calves hit the cushioned surface of her bed.

They fell upon it together, his body pressing heavily into hers. Slowly his fingertips traced her throat, continued downward between her breasts, and paused at her waist. He grinned evilly as her breathing became frantic.

Suddenly he grabbed a fistful of fabric and tore her gown open. He rose up slightly to part his robe and noticed Allura trying to cover herself with her hands.

Laughing softly, he pulled them away and pinned them above her head.

"No! Not like this! Not with you!" she pleaded, tears welling up in her eyes.

He looked at her keenly. "So, my little slave is a modest virgin," he breathed, "How pleasing that I should be your first!"

Shaking uncontrollably, she quickly turned her face away, avoiding his look of triumph.

And then, to her surprise, there was a click and a bright glow appeared just above her head.

"Get . . . off . . . her . . . you . . . filth!" hissed a deadly voice.

Zarkon froze.

Allura looked up.

Under the faint glow of the room's amber lights, Prince Lotor brought his laser sword to the back of his father's neck, singeing his skin. The young man's face was set in a look of murderous rage.

The old king shook with anger, his upper lip pulling away from his sharp teeth.

"I said, get off!" Lotor snarled.

Zarkon glanced down at Allura. "I will have you yet!" he vowed, his face quivering spasmodically. He released her arms and rose up to his knees, drawing his robe close about him.

Shakily, Allura grasped the remnants of her gown and covered herself as best she could.

Backing cautiously off the bed, Zarkon stood and turned to face his son.

Lotor moved toward Allura and held out his hand, never taking his eyes off his father. Once she had taken it, he quickly pulled her up to him.

When she was safely behind him, he leveled his sword and stalked forward.

Zarkon backed away, glaring at his son.

Lotor's unkempt hair hung in a thick mass over one shoulder; his pants were ripped, exposing much of his muscular legs; and his upper body showed the past punishment it had endured.

"Your end has come, you betrayer!" the prince spat.

Zarkon laughed. "You think you have me, eh? Well, think again!" And with that he stepped on a hidden switch and disappeared through an opening in the wall.

Lotor lunged forward, but the portal had closed. He struck his sword savagely against the cold stone. "I will kill that fiend if it's the last thing I ever do!" he roared.

Breathing heavily, he stood facing the wall, trying to gain control of his anger.

As it slowly ebbed away, he turned and looked at Allura, who had sunk to the floor and was massaging her sore wrists, silent tears falling softly from her reddened eyes.

Overwhelmed with remorse, he switched off his sword and stepped toward her. "Please forgive me! I should never have brought you here!"

Surprised by his apology, she looked up at him uncertainly. Her tear-stained face pierced his heart. He moved forward and gently took her hands in his, raising her to her feet and enfolded her trembling body protectively in his arms. As her crying renewed, he held her close, softly stroking her hair. A few moments later, her sobbing subsided, he lifted her chin so that he could look into her eyes and gave her a tentative smile.

Just then, there was a tremendous pounding on the door. Zarkon's guards were applying a laser-ram, and in moments would fall upon them!

Lotor inhaled sharply. "Quick! There's no time! I fused the doors shut, but they will not hold. You must escape from here!"

"But how?" she cried.

"Don't worry! You will see!" And he rushed her out onto the balcony.

Suddenly the doors melted, and a mob of angry guards swarmed over the threshold. Lotor turned to face them, his laser sword flickering to life. "Come, you fools! I will make this your last night!"

The guards hesitated, the deadly look in Lotor's gleaming eyes striking fear in their hearts.

Behind them, the massive form of his father loomed. "Forward you idiots! I want that girl!"

Holding the torn remains of her gown around her, Allura moved back until she reached the railing at the balcony's edge.

"You'll regret this, old man!" Lotor growled.

Zarkon gave a loud snort. "She's mine, like all the others you've brought here, only this is better because you really love this one!"

Lotor howled with rage, and all became chaos inside the room. He began slashing his way through the nearest guards, creating a bloody trail to his father.

Outside, Allura watched, horrified at the violent carnage erupting within.

Amid the melee, she thought she heard a strange noise. It sounded like a kind of *sproing*. A few seconds later, she heard it again, but this time it was a little louder.

Puzzled, she turned and looked behind her.

Something came into view a few feet below the balcony and then disappeared. The sound occurred again, and springing up before her was a boy on a pogo stick, who winked at her through his glasses and disappeared again into the mist.

She couldn't believe her eyes! It was Pidge on his motorized pogo stick! Each jump brought him closer to the balcony's ledge.

He continued to calibrate the stick's height setting until finally he was level with her room. He plummeted to the bottom one last time, hit the ground, and slammed the accelerator with his foot. By tilting the stick slightly forward, he executed a perfect landing on the lofty patio.

"Pidge!" she cried as she rushed to him, her arms outstretched.

He embraced her fiercely, "C'mon, Princess! There's no time to lose!" he yelled.

Allura climbed up behind him, her feet on either side of his, and flung her arms around his chest.

She threw one last look at Lotor and the overwhelming odds arrayed against him.

Sensing her gaze, the prince paused, locking eyes with hers, a turmoil of emotions churning within him.

A nearby guard saw his chance and brought his dagger slicing down, cutting Lotor deeply across the right shoulder and chest.

Allura screamed his name as he fell to the floor, the guards rushing forward over his body.

As laser blasts seared past them, Pidge hit the jump switch. With a loud *sproing*, they shot high up into the air, Allura tightening her grip on Pidge as they reached the apex of their ascent. Rapidly they arced through the air and then fell back toward the rocky ground. They hit

hard and sprang back up into the sky, not as high this time, and swiftly bounced away from Zarkon's stronghold to the place where the Lions were hidden and an anxious Lance waited.

At the edge of the balcony, Zarkon watched in amazement as his intended chattel escaped.

He could not believe it. She had escaped on a child's toy! "Send all patrol craft out at once!" he bellowed.

His men stumbled over each other in their rush to comply.

Turning, he went back into Allura's apartment, slowly stepping over the sprawling corpses that covered the floor.

He eventually came to a stop over the lifeless body of his son.

Lotor lay in a pool of blood, his long hair fanned outward around his motionless face, his sightless eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

"You would have made a formidable king," Zarkon commented, and left the room.

A short time later, in his viewing room, the king of Doom watched as two points of colored light shot upward and disappeared into space.

He smiled grimly. "Run, my little Princess . . . I am right behind you."