

# **T'En Trilogy Book One**

## **Extract**

### **Chapter One**

General Tulkhan strode the halls of the Stronghold, triumphant. But even though the last of the T'En royal family had surrendered he experienced no thrill of victory for his father, the Ghebite King was dead.

Shattering glass broke his concentration. Heart pounding, he spun around. Nothing.

According to the Terms of Surrender he had promised there would be no wanton destruction. Senses strained, he made out the muffled sounds of jeering male voices a little way down the passage. Scuffling noises were followed swiftly by a man's frustrated yelp of pain. Tulkhan cursed in three languages. He had forbidden his soldiers the rights of conquest. There was to be no looting, no women. It was hard on the men who had followed him so faithfully. They expected -- no, they deserved -- their rewards of victory but Tulkhan had granted terms and, besides, he wanted to study the renowned T'En culture and that meant preserving it where possible.

Suppressing his annoyance he strode toward an ornate set of double doors as he heard one of his men shout a warning followed swiftly by a dull thud and more curses.

Throwing the doors open he took in the carnage -- the smashed pots, exposed scrolls, the stench of the preserving fluid. Two of his men stood with their backs to him, restraining a woman. Three of his Elite Guard circled the captive nursing various injuries.

Tulkhan immediately disregarded the haggard old man in the corner who was watching all of this with bright eyes could possibly be the cause of this mayhem. It had to be the female his men were

attempting to subdue. He cursed silently. It wasn't like his Elite guard to disobey an order.

'Halt! What is this?'

An ominous silence descended on the room. His men looked almost sheepish. For an instant amusement pierced Tulkhan's irritation but he did not reveal it.

'A veritable hellcat, General,' one man ventured.

With a flick of his wrist Tulkhan signalled the Ghebite guard to turn the captive toward him and prepared to be lenient. He could afford to be magnanimous, his army was victorious.

But this was no ordinary captive. His guards restrained one of the legendary T'En. Jolted, Tulkhan swallowed. His instinctive revulsion warred with a deeper fascination.

The female was a pure T'En -- in his own language an accursed Dhamfeer -- a dangerous alien creature with mysterious powers. Dishevelled but defiant she glared at him, her torn bodice revealing small, firm breasts which rose and fell with each short breath. But it was her unnatural gaze which captivated him. The old superstitions were true. The eyes of a pure Dhamfeer were dark as red wine, red as the blood the which ran in a rivulet from her swollen lips down her long neck, over her high breasts.

He should have been repelled for she was the antithesis of a Ghebite woman.

Instead of a rich coppery sheen, her flesh was as white as milk. A fine tracery of blue veins ran underneath the skin's surface like marble. Absently, he wondered if her skin was as flawless to stroke as that silky stone. His fingers tingled in anticipation of an exploratory touch. Riveted by the sight of the Dhamfeer's milky flesh, streaked red by her own blood Tulkhan felt his body respond. A rush of lust which

was equal parts fascination and fear gripped him. Shocked, he licked dry lips. Never had he known such an immediate reaction.

By all that was holy he should despise this Dhamfeer! She was not even a True-woman. According to the Ghebite priests women possessed weak, inferior souls. Tulkhan smiled grimly. He was sure the priests would declare this female Dhamfeer possessed no soul. After all, she was little more than a beast.

If so, why did he read intelligence in her strange eyes?

Taking a deep breath, he put theological questions aside and considered the situation. He had personally viewed the remains of several half-breed Dhamfeer during this campaign but never come face to face with a live specimen. To see one who was not only very much live but so obviously pure Dhamfeer reminded him that this was a foreign land, recently ruled by the legendary T'En.

He shuddered, suddenly aware of a strange scent which made his heart race. It was not the taint of fear -- having been soldiering since he was seventeen, he knew that intimately. This scent was rich and slightly musky. Suddenly he felt an overwhelming urge to lose himself in its source.

With a start he realised it was coming from the Dhamfeer. Why didn't she fear for her life? Why did she respond to threat with this heady, sensual scent?

In a flash of insight he recalled the survival instincts of a little marsupial, a native of his homeland. When threatened by its natural predator this creature gave off a scent which mimicked the mating scent of the predator. In the resulting confusion the marsupial had a chance to escape. With a start he realised the Dhamfeer was trying to protect herself by seducing him.

'Stop that!'

She blinked, confused. 'Stop what?'

Tulkhan cursed under his breath, unable to explain. How could he prove his suspicion? Who would believe him when his explanation presupposed that the Dhamfeer could control her scent?

Just what could the Dhamfeer do?

Superstition held that one of her race could possess a True-man such as himself with the sheer power of their will. The hardened soldier in Tulkhan shrugged this aside -- a great deal of nonsense was said about this almost mythical island. They'd said it was impregnable and he had proved them wrong.

Command meant never revealing weakness and years of command came to the fore. Stifling his disquiet, the General turned on his men. 'So it takes five of you to subdue a mere female!'

They wilted under the attack, resentfully eyeing the ground.

The Dhamfeer smiled and he caught a glimpse of her sharp white teeth. He realised she was enjoying the guards' discomfiture, the hell-cat! He itched to wipe that sly smile from her face, to subdue those defiant eyes and see that proud chin fall.

Superstition also said that the eyes of the Dhamfeer could ensorcel you. Tulkhan held her wine-dark gaze, meeting those feral eyes with a challenge of his own.

Nothing! He experienced no tingling apprehension of ensorcellment. Even better -- for an instant he thought he read a flicker of fear quickly cloaked.

Having proven folklore wrong, Tulkhan assessed his captive. This Dhamfeer was very young. Her own people must have considered her too young to fight or she would have died at their side on the battlefield.

He grimaced -- how barbaric of these people train their women for their regular army, and condone their slaughter on the battlefield! The Elite Guard waited with bated breath as the conquering Ghebite General confronted the last of the T'En royal family.

Imoshen met General Tulkhan's eyes, desperate not to reveal how he unnerved her. She'd heard he was a freakish giant, bigger than a normal Ghebite warrior. But seeing him in the flesh was startling. His massive dark form dominated the room. She had to look up to meet his eyes and this annoyed Imoshen. Being pure T'En, only the tallest of True-men could look her in the eye and she hadn't realised till now how much she enjoyed looking down on people.

But it was more than that. This Ghebite General looked utterly alien in his flamboyant war finery. He'd removed his crested helmet revealing dark, sweat dampened hair which clung in fine tendrils to his broad cheek bones. With his strange, coppery skin and obsidian black eyes he was the antithesis of her own kind -- extrinsic, unknown and unknowable.

But what unnerved her most was the sharp intelligence she perceived in his calculating, dark eyes and the cynical twist to his mouth. Here was man who believed in nothing, who would stop at nothing. As she held his gaze she realised he was studying her, assessing her. A prickle of fear moved over her skin raising the fine hairs. This Ghebite was too clever for her liking. She feared perceptive intelligence in an invader more than brutality.

Worse. She was his captive! Her heart sank, but she would not reveal her weakness to him.

Instead, she raged at the ignominy of her position -- to confront her captor like this, restrained and half naked! But she would not grovel. If only she had heeded the Aayel's advice. Not so long ago she had stood in the window embrasure unwilling to face the reality of their defeat. If only she could go back and retrace those impetuous steps which had led her to this!