

This was the original introduction to the character known as Mistress Jana, aka the second JARROD. It was rewritten as per my publisher's suggestion, through the eyes of Crow who was introduced first in the final version. It was felt this scene was too 'detached' and too confusing for readers only just jumping to the Southern Continent after the Were-fey attacked the JARROD II, Janis and Layloni. It might interest those who have read (or are about to read) [Road to the Soul](#) and is offered her for your enjoyment! Kim

Chapter 3-- Deleted Scene

The Southern Continent was a fertile land though plagued with harsh and unpredictable weather—storms, floods, droughts, high wind and a huge tidal flux that could drag the shoreline back to the horizon or push it up to the mountains' knees. Lithia was more like an island than a large land mass. The seas—Volitius in the north, aptly named for its unpredictable rips and vicious fauna, and the Argon to the south, waters that covered much of vast centre of the continent—were the cause. Volatile indeed.

She got a feel for the sudden fluctuations in weather when clouds suddenly whirled in. The sky went from blue with white puffs to slate gray oppression. It dumped a deluge before she could so much as find a tree. What to do now?

Her eyesight was superior, once adjusted. She spotted a dwelling near the shore of Volitius. It was made of wood and built on stilts. A rickety spiral staircase led from the rocks below to a high balcony. There was a fishing boat beached beneath the structure and many nets, polls and buoys. Smoke wafted from the chimney and the windows glowed golden. If the natives were friendlier than the winged creatures, it would be an adequate shelter.

She made her way down the narrow track, drenched and shivering, climbed the creaking steps and knocked. The occupants, a male and two females—one large and one small—didn't say much but they let her inside. Their faces were fearful as they shared food and offered healing—a temporary measure, they said. She would need a skilled physician to deal with her injuries. Apparently there were none nearby. They also commended her for bravery. They must be quite painful, the wounds. She didn't know about that. She'd blocked such sensory perceptions. They were too distracting.

As the evening progressed, the occupants became more comfortable, especially the smaller one. The little thing talked nonsense though. It wasn't logical—she was the least capable but the other two deferred to her. They called her child but she seemed to be in charge. When the smaller one's needs were met and she was deactivated for the night, the others talked more readily—mostly extraneous bits of lore and superstition. Few facts. But from them, she learned more about this place—about Lithia, the Southern Continent of Gaela.

'Aye, it is shaped like a horseshoe, our Lithia,' the man said. He had short sandy hair that kept falling in his eyes. His face was tanned like dark leather and his hands thick and calloused.

'The wrong way up,' the woman said. She was slender and smiling, her hands no less calloused than his.

She didn't know what that meant and questioned it.

'Wrong way,' the female said again, miming with her hand. 'All the luck falls out.'

'It's a restless land, Mistress,' he said.

The reference made no sense. How could land be either restful or restless?

‘The provinces are at war with each other, skirmishes on every border. All in turn are against the mountain Temple of Timbali. But you know that, don’t you, Mistress. I speak out of turn.’ The woman lowered her head.

It became apparent they took her for a ‘mistress of battle’—a female engaged in the ongoing border wars. In Lithia, according to these fishing peasants, genders were equal and classes separated by wealth and occupation only. Warriors were respected, if not feared, and always taken in if they required aid. The greatest bias in Litha seemed to be against the use of ‘magic’ or conscious manipulation of matter. Interesting. She would have to go with technology. No matter. She was versed in both. ‘Tell me more.’

‘Of what I know?’ The fisherman’s eyes shifted about the room. ‘Well, pleasing you, of course, Mistress. But what is it you’d like to hear?’

‘More of the land, the provinces, the means and nature of trade. Resources and technologies.’

‘Technologies?’

‘You’re from across the sea?’ the woman asked.

She nodded. It was what they could understand.

‘But you’re a warrior of Jarn?’ he said it hopefully.

‘I fight for the strongest province.’ Safe.

‘Jarn!’ The fisherman smiled, the creases in his brow lightening. ‘That’s our allegiance too.’ He seemed relieved and it loosened his tongue. ‘I’d not known there were recruits from other lands. What vessels you must have to cross the Draconian Sea, or was it the Argon?’ When she didn’t respond, he shrugged. ‘No matter. I can tell you much about the land.’

She waited.

‘The land is divided by purpose, crops, mining, grazing, farming, fishing—our trade as you know.’

‘We salt the catch and sell it in the local markets. If there is enough, it is dried and sent by steam to Jarn.’

‘Steam?’

‘The steam trains. They crisscross the provinces, though lately the tracks are exploded by neighbouring factions—cars derailed. Silly really, it damages us all.’ she said.

‘Too many dying in the border wars . . .’ he said.

Steam, mining and explosives. Promising.

The woman was talking now. She was more informative, more articulate. ‘There’s a growing industry in Lithia, now that they’ve banned magic. We had to turn to sources independent of the temples. Power is generated initially from hot spots erupting beneath the surface. It used to disperse through the catacombs but now they tap it. It’s transferred via a system of pipes beneath population centres.’

‘And?’

‘It turns generators in the cities and provides lighting, heating, transport and manufacturing . . . for those who can afford it.’

‘Afford it?’

‘Many Lithians are slaves,’ he said in a low voice as if escaping the notice of an invisible ear.

It took time but eventually they divulged more about the complex economic system. Slavery was condoned by all save the province of Timbali—the temple that still taught magic. The only temple left standing. The indentured were mostly used for manual pursuits in the

mines, abattoirs and other industries—logging, metallurgy and brick making. Education was geared towards trades and guilds established in the family line.

‘Once a fisher, always a fisher. My daughter will be one too.’ The man nodded to the leader’s room.

‘Not a warrior?’

‘Not possible. We fish, so she must fish.’ He put another log on the fire. ‘It’s a good life.’

Was he regretful or relieved? She didn’t care, but what he told her of the military was promising. She asked more questions and checked her database for geothermic scans of the continent, cataloguing the information. The history appeared straightforward. The armed forces were well established in Lithia and growing daily. Many avenues to explore.

‘Tell me more about the magic. Why was it banned?’

They both started talking at once, interrupting each other.

She waved them silent and pointed at the woman. ‘You tell it.’

‘Yes, Mistress.’ She cleared her throat. ‘Once there were powerful temples throughout Lithia. They ruled their province and were towers of learning, healing and creativity. That was until the floods came. Much land—and many temples—succumbed and any of the covens still standing were challenged.’

‘They were stoned to death for failing to predict the disaster,’ he said.

The fisherwoman nodded. ‘Many lives had been lost—crops and stock included—and surviving factions blamed each other. The power shifted. Warriors supported new leaders and the priests and priestesses—the witches of magic—retreated to the only haven, or died.’

‘Mostly they died, save in Timbali,’ he said. ‘The slave population sprang from the children of the temples that were left behind.’

‘Orphaned,’ she added. ‘Timbali still practices the old arts and guards their borders fiercely. It’s said they have fey powers and will not turn away a pilgrim seeking healing or guidance, but will brook no warrior’s threat.’

‘Go on.’

‘After the flood, geysers of steam were found which they harnessed with pipes and valves and caps. Watchmakers, jewellers, black smiths and well diggers came into their own.’

‘Called ‘engineers’ nowadays,’ he said.

‘Interesting. Who rules Timbali?’

‘The High Priestess. The last of her kind. It is said she has no child.’

‘Name?’

‘Cortesa Mar Lemur,’ he said in a whisper.

Do the walls listen? It didn’t matter. She’d gleaned, painfully slowly, what she needed from these humans. The budding (but rudimentary) technology was now in the hands of a few of the provinces. ‘Magic’ was shunned and in most places outright condemned . There were some gender biases (a problem for her now that she was in a female physicality) but the issues were not unsurmountable. Females from the right class and of high intelligence could rise to power. No problem there. These people were imbeciles by comparison to her thought processing. The ability to calculate infinite possibilities in superposition outstripped organic brain function, as long as they weren’t tapped in. And, they weren’t.

Still, she was in a physical body—trapped in it, for now, until she found something better to transfer to. These fishing people were not an option. They were a cohesive group not accustomed to one of their members taking off alone. No point raising suspicions or being followed. There would be another chance soon enough. Meanwhile, her body was damaged.

Extensive repairs were required and she knew where to get them—Timbali Temple. She would leave at sunrise.

Eventually they stopped talking and went to sleep—but not before giving her fresh bandages and suitable clothing. Hers had been shredded, torn and blood stained. She dressed in faded grey fishermen pants, a long white top that fell below the knees, sandals and a natural wool shawl. They also gave her a water skin, a pack with food (dried fish and apples) and a few copper coins. They seemed pleased to be able to assist a warrior of Jarn. Pity she'd lost her sword, but not to worry. Timbali would heal her, if anyone could. Apparently the damage was severe but if she survived, she could make her way back to her legion good as new.

The man offered to escort her to the borders of Jarn Province but she declined. Even in her wounded state, he would slow her down. It was better to be on one's own. He'd given general directions to Timbali, reminding her that to be healed she must not reveal her warrior status. They hoped she would make it. Clearly they didn't think she would. Feeble minds. It wasn't that far to the land where healing was given without question. It would be the ideal place to heal the body and assess. No timetable at this point. She had two thousand years to line things up.

As the sun cracked the horizon she climbed back down the spiral steps and followed the road towards Timbali. It was a meandering thread made of baked yellow clay raised above the tidal flats. It wove in and out of mangrove swamps finally opening onto a wide expanse of coastal marshes and seagrass. The brown odoriferous sludge was covered with white and yellow plovers—the sound deafening. She marched on, not stopping to eat the food or drink the water. Her goal was to reach Timbali. Why delay?

The answer came at dusk. She'd followed the crude directions of the fisherman and kept to the road skirting the northern mountains. If she travelled three more days without stopping, she'd arrive on the third day before dark. But as the sun set her body collapsed out from under her. Malfunction.

It took the entire night and a full water skin before she could move it again. In the morning the going was slow—the body weak. Damaged. The yellow road turned brown and dusty. It rolled up and down the hills, cutting through endless pastures. The sky darkened. More rest was required. And shelter. The water was gone. Darkness.

‘Are you unwell?’

She lifted her eyes, shading them. The sun glared between the clouds. A man stood before her one hand on his hip, the other holding a donkey hitched to a cart. He appeared to be a peasant. Would a slave be alone? Unattended? If not a slave he was of a low ranking class, like the fisherman. She scanned his brain and found it surprisingly active. He was capable of learning, adapting. He might even be cunning. She decided to continue the contact. He could be helpful and she needed it. The body was degrading—no response to her attempts to regulate it or, at this point, move it.

‘I could use some help.’

He reached out his hand. ‘What’s your name?’

She considered how best to respond. Was gender associated with most proper names on this continent as they were often on Earth? According to the fisherman, names had even more defining association with class and status. Mistress was preferable. It had the most potential.

‘Mistress Jana,’ she said, making short of her predecessor designation.

‘A mistress of battle? Warrior of Jarn? But dressed like a fisher?’ He appeared impressed, or was that appalled? Confused? Human body language often contradicted the verbal. He would be aware of her physical damage.

‘I have fought recently, if that’s what you mean. I am a traveller seeking healing’

He wouldn’t look her in the eye. ‘Timbali?’ he whispered.

‘Exactly.’

‘Perhaps I can guide you.’ He made a strange gesture and turned his pockets inside out.

Odd little Man.

She thanked him and he made room inside the cart, moving a crate of tools to the back. He helped her get comfortable and on down the road they travelled. ‘I don’t recognise your uniform.’ He paused for her to answer and when she didn’t say anything he went on. ‘Where did you come from?’

She considered. Origin would align her with a province—fine for the fisherman but best avoided at this point. There was no knowing which were at odds with each other and as he said, the ‘uniform’ didn’t fit. To gain healing, she’d best not be part of any military. ‘North,’ she said, waving her hand in the general direction.

He followed her line of sight. ‘How far north?’

‘Beyond the Draconian Sea.’

He faltered so she added, ‘far beyond’ just to make the point. That would confound him. If the fishing family was anything to go by, no one had a concept of what was ‘far beyond’ their north seas. To them it was unknown territory—their tiny boats and steamers were unable to cross the channel that separated the continents (though they did believe in a northern land. Conjecture, but true. The channel was over a thousand leagues across and many times that deep. A double

cross current ripped through creating a standing wave where the waters crashed into one another. It was like a giant geyser in the middle of the ocean and no vessel had found its way to the other side. Many though had perished trying. She could see an outline of their sunken hulls far beneath the surface. The people of Lithia had yet to solve basic navigational issues. Not very bright.

So far she hadn't met with a scrap of intelligence in these people, save perhaps this donkey man. Certainly they had little geographical awareness outside their small, circumscribed, and highly disputed, territories. There were border skirmishes waged between major provinces—Jarn fought Mandira, Mandira fought Orn and they all fought Timbali, or tried to. According to the fishers, they were like chickens pecking at the farmer's boots. No harm done, but they could trip her up. Magic in Timbali? She doubted it, but would soon see for herself.

She sat in the donkey cart, travelling down the sunbaked roads. The animal trotted, harness bells jingling, it's small hard hooves creating puffs of dust with each mincing step. Out in the fields, farmers were hoeing rows of corn and in the distance, quite a far distance near the foothills, she saw herders with horses and goats. They made their living off the land. Small minds, all of them, including the railroad workers who pounded and chipped and hammered their way along, laying track for the steam engines. Their minds were filled with thoughts of returning home at night, meals with their families, a day off to teach their children to hunt and swim. Useless, misguided thoughts. A waste of energy. She couldn't employ any of them.

It might be a long wait before she met a comparable mind. It might be a long wait before she was called back to Earth. I'm the last stop gap for that world. Their secret weapon. Her face remained expressionless. 'Are these your lands?' she asked.

The man shook his head, his brown hair and sun weathered skin blurring from the action. She couldn't see the exact colour of his eyes. He avoided the contact. All had done that since she

left the shores—since she'd been attacked by those creatures. She wondered if it was a problem with her visual display. Her face felt in one piece after the skirmish but who knew, maybe she had bilateral hyphemas—a condition where the anterior chambers of the eye filled to the brim with blood. She hadn't noticed when she (a he at the time) had taken over Janis's body. He'd been too busy shoving her consciousness into the depths and locking the door. He'd had to wall off her neural pathways and set up partitions, firewalls and alarms to make sure he was in charge of the body vehicle and not Janis. Tricky, but successful, and now he was a she. Judging by the human responses, the body was no longer pleasant to look at. Perhaps it was the blood soaking through or the talon marks that made them uncomfortable.

'Not my land,' he said. The human response time was terribly slow.

'Whose land is it?'

'We're on a border, Mistress, between Timbali, Jarn and Orn.' The man stopped the cart and got out to guide the donkey around a fallen tree. 'Came down in the storm,' he said. 'Or a skirmish. These are disputed lands, always under fire.'

She noticed he was barefoot. Obviously a peasant. Would she be any better off in his body? Checking probability: Not likely. She needed someone of higher class. Someone of wealth or power.

He got back in the cart, still avoiding her eyes. 'The tracks are being laid by the Protectorate of Jarn, whom we serve. Timbali is that way.' He pointed.

Janis lifted her eyes (her possibly red, demon looking eyes) to the north. The direction he indicated was a rugged country—the soil red, the mountains high and the sun blistering hot even behind cloud cover. There were many birds—crows or ravens for the most part. No Were-fey. Fortunately the creatures—not in her data banks—were nowhere to be seen. Though curious

looking, like a hybrid with their strange wings, long serpent necks and vicious claws, the species was deadly. Their tails had a poisonous barb hidden under the boa plumage. Dangerous. She'd have to watch out.

'Timbali Temple will heal travellers, I understand?'

'Yes, Mistress.'

'Take me to them,' Jana said. It was a simple request. 'Take me now.' Her body was collapsing again.

'The temple is far out of my way, if you please, Mistress.'

He only just calculated this? Maybe not as smart as she first thought.

'But you are right to seek their healer. She is the most learned of all Lithia, though the protectorates try to spread rumours otherwise.'

'The most learned in all of Lithia?' Jana repeated. 'Tell me, do they use 'magic' these learned people?'

'They say they do, Mistress.' He kept his voice neutral showing neither favour nor disgust. 'All of this.' He opened his arms wide. 'From the west coast to the high mountain ridges of the east—from the north shores to those distant foothill is Timbali.'

'And the leader?'

'The High Priestess Cortesa Lemur.'

'And who rules over all the provinces?'

The peasant again shook his head. 'No one rules more than one territory.'

Perfect.

'The Timbali High Priestess will help you . . .' he said. Self repetition. 'Don't worry about your face. They will heal it.'

So there is facial damage. It must have developed after she took over Janis. The data files showed that things like bruising and contusions could take time to manifest. It was odd that she couldn't sense the periphery of this bio-mass at all. Sensory perceptions were limited but not completely shut down. She had to navigate, sense textures, the ground beneath her feet. There was a conflict in her interfacing. A problem to analyse. Computing.

The cart took a road to the north. It wound through the foothill pastures until it became a winding mountain track. The cliffs were sheer and the wind howled past in gusts. Another storm coming? The loose ends of cloth around her body fluttered. The peasant looked away. 'How much further?' she asked.

'To the tableland.' He pointed straight up. 'An hour's climb.'

The cart rolled on and eventually they came to a long flight of steps cut from the rock. Twisting shrubs and wind sculpted trees lined either side. It was almost too steep for the cart. They had to get out and lead the donkey along. When they reached the top, the tableland as he called it, she saw that it was only the beginning of the climb. The temple was situated far above them—a settlement that appeared to be carved, like the steps, out of the mountain. She could see the peaks of the roofs, flags snapping about the towers. The tableland itself was no more than a wide grassy ledge with a few sheep cropping the grass. The animals ignored them and continued to graze—like machines. The donkey joined them as soon as the cart was unhitched.

Clouds gathered.

'The afternoon rains come,' he said. They did every day. It kept things green. Water was necessary for production.

She looked at the spiralling path to the temple. She didn't want to make the climb in the rain. Apparently he didn't either.

‘I can go no further,’ the man said.

‘Explain.’

He did the strange thing with his pockets again—turned them inside out. ‘We’ve been seen.’ He waved vaguely towards the temple. ‘They will send someone for you. They will know how to help you. I will leave you as soon as you make good.’ His hand came out, palm open.

‘How do you know we’ve been seen?’ There had been no verbal communication detected. What did he mean?

The peasant smiled, able to look at her now. He had missing teeth. ‘The temple watches. They know.’

‘How?’ Telepathy would not serve her in this instance. She couldn’t allow any probing into her mind or attempts to pick up thoughts that weren’t secured. Especially if they could reach Janis’ thoughts, if she still had any. Problems prioritized. Computing.

‘The bird has flown,’ he said.

She hadn’t noticed, but on review of her digital memory, there it was—a large black bird taking off from the trees and winging its way to the temple far above.

‘They see the bird and then they see me. They see you as well. They will come.’ He made a little bowing motion, his hand still outstretched. I shall leave you?

‘Wait.’

He did.

‘You could be useful.’

The man didn’t smile. Perhaps useful was the wrong word.

‘I’m looking for a guide.’

His shoulders hunched. It was like he was trying to make himself small. Fear? She checked her data file on human service, the history of. A slave would be best but this man was free to come and go as he pleased. He would require a wage. Empty pockets. It made sense now. ‘I will pay you, of course.’ she said.

He smiled. ‘Gold?’

Gold was what he wanted. It was mined on this continent. She computed the repositories across all regions. Mapping geological formations. Deposits located. Verify quality required. There was gold and there was gold. . . ‘Show me a sample.’

The peasant pulled a small flat piece, a coin, fastened to a leather thong around his neck. ‘Two this size, every moon.’

She studied the metal for a nanosecond and attempted to produce matching objects—Tulpa-gold. Nothing. Problems. Reprioritized. Manipulation of matter by thoughts malfunctioning. Why? Most likely cause—extremely high water content of physicality creating dampening field. Computing alternatives, If not Tulpa-gold, then the real thing would be required. ‘I have access to gold. Two every moon.’ Judging by the way the peasant’s eyes enlarged he was hoping to bargain for much less. Too late now. No matter. Gold was easy. She had located a vein within a day’s travel. It was close to the surface with no dwellings or mining activity within a twenty kilometre radius.

‘It’s a deal then. I will be your guide, Mistress Jana.

She checked her data files for possible appropriate responses. ‘What will I call you?’

‘My name is Crow,’ the donkey man said. He overlooked her injuries now and kept contact with her eyes (did he see gold there?) His eyes were blue-white, like the bird he was named for.

‘Crow,’ she said. The designation was inconsequential. Still, as she acquired more servants (a necessity) it would be relevant for telling them apart. ‘How long do we have to wait?’ Once one became enmeshed in linear time, the experience of it gained exponential importance—as if it were a commodity and not a concept.

Crow put down his staff and squatted. ‘We have to wait until they come.’

‘Obviously. How long?’

He didn’t seem to understand the question. Instead he pulled out a short pipe and blew into it, bird calls filling the air. Checking data files. Music. a) A way of shifting energy from one place to another, intrinsically woven into the theory and practical understanding of time. b) A means of healing (was he trying to heal her?) c) A means of communication. d) A path to enlightenment (whatever that was. The data files didn’t explain.) e) A form of entertainment, to pass the time. Apparently playing music was his way of answering the question. A harmless pursuit. Allowing it.

Janis sat in the grass next to the donkey man, next to Crow, and waited. After many songs he asked something about food—did she want any? She realised the body, her body, was not the same as the Tulpa created from thought. It was weak. Humans were weak. She would find a way to make improvements. Computing. Prioritizing solutions. The body would be a problem on many levels.

She took the water he offered, and the dried fruit. The sun vanished completely behind clouds—white thunderheads turned dark with the weight of the storm. They grew heavy. Rain fell.

‘Under the trees,’ Crow said. He led the way.

Organic life was full of dependency. Being in a human body was going to require constant attention. There was no point in risking irreparable damage though, until she could shift into an alternative hardware. She drank. Water fed the watery body. Primitive. Inefficient. It also amplified the dampening field. No wonder humans could barely understand each other, barely communicate. It was like whispering through brick walls. The rain poured while they hunched under the trees. The sheep joined them. The donkey grazed, impervious, or too hungry to care. Crow kept saying it wouldn't be long. Repetitive, but harmless. She allowed it.
