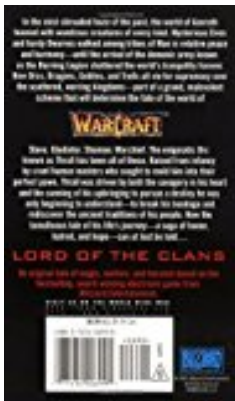


[PDF] Lord Of The Clans (Warcraft, Book 2)

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Description:

About the Author *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author **Christie Golden** has written more than forty novels and several short stories in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Among her many projects are over a dozen *Star Trek* novels and several original fantasy novels. An avid player of *World of Warcraft*, she has written two manga short stories and several novels in that world (*Lord of the Clans*, *Rise of the Horde*, *Arthas: Rise of the Lich King*, and *The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm*, *Thrall: Twilight of the Aspects*, and *Jaina Proudmoore: Tides of War*). She has also written the *StarCraft Dark Templar Saga: Firstborn*, *Shadow Hunters*, and *Twilight*, as well as the most recent hardcover, *Devils' Due*. Golden is also the writer of three books

in the major nine-book Star Wars series Fate of the Jedi (in collaboration with Aaron Allston and Troy Denning). Golden lives in Tennessee. She welcomes visitors to her website: ChristieGolden.com.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One

Even the beasts were cold on a night such as this, mused Durotan. Absently he reached out to his wolf companion and scratched Sharptooth behind one of his white ears. The animal crooned appreciatively and snuggled closer. Wolf and orc chief stared together at the silent fall of white snow, framed by the rough oval that was the entrance to Durotan's cave.

Once, Durotan, chieftain of the Frostwolf clan, had known the kiss of balmy climes. Had swung his ax in the sunlight, narrowing small eyes against the gleam of sunshine on metal and against the spattering of red human blood. Once, he had felt a kinship with all of his people, not just those of his clan. Side by side they had stood, a green tide of death flooding over the hillsides to engulf the humans. They had feasted at the fires together, laughed their deep, booming laughs, told the stories of blood and conquest while their children drowsed by the dying embers, their little minds filled with images of slaughter.

But now the handful of orcs that comprised the Frostwolf clan shivered alone in their exile in the frigid Alterac Mountains of this alien world. Their only friends here were the huge white wolves. They were so different from the mammoth black wolves that Durotan's people had once ridden, but a wolf was a wolf, no matter the color of its fur, and determined patience combined with Drek'Thar's powers had won the beasts over to them. Now orc and wolf hunted together and kept one another warm during the interminable, snowy nights.

A soft, snuffling sound from the heart of the cave caused Durotan to turn. His harsh face, lined and held in perpetual tautness from years of worry and anger, softened at the noise. His little son, as yet unnamed until the ordained Naming Day of this cycle, had cried out as he was being fed.

Leaving Sharptooth to continue watching the snowfall, Durotan rose and lumbered back to the cave's inner chamber. Draka had bared a breast for the child to suckle upon, and had just removed the infant from his task. So that was why the child had whimpered. As Durotan watched, Draka extended a forefinger. With a black nail honed to razor sharpness, she pricked deep into the nipple before returning the infant's small head to her breast. Not a flicker of pain crossed her beautiful, strong-jawed face. Now, as the child fed, he would drink not only nourishing mother's milk, but his mother's blood as well. Such was appropriate food for a budding young warrior, the son of Durotan, the future chieftain of the Frostwolves.

His heart swelled with love for his mate, a warrior his equal in courage and cunning, and the lovely, perfect son they had borne.

It was then that the knowledge of what he had to do sank over him, like a blanket settling over his shoulders. He sat down and sighed deeply.

Draka glanced up at him, her brown eyes narrowing. She knew him all too well. He did not want to tell her of his sudden decision, although he knew in his heart it was the right one. But he must.

"We have a child now," Durotan said, his deep voice booming from his broad chest.

"Yes," replied Draka, pride in her voice. "A fine, strong son, who will lead the Frostwolf clan after his

father dies nobly in battle. Many years from now," she added.

"I have a responsibility for his future," Durotan continued.

Draka's attention was now on him fully. He thought her exquisitely beautiful at this moment, and tried to brand the image of her in his mind. The firelight played against her green skin, casting her powerful muscles into sharp relief and making her tusks gleam. She did not interrupt, merely waited for him to continue.

"Had I not spoken against Gul'dan, our son would have more playmates with which to grow up," Durotan continued. "Had I not spoken against Gul'dan, we would have continued to be valued members of the Horde."

Draka hissed, opening her massive jaws and baring her fangs in displeasure at her mate. "You would not have been the mate I joined with," she boomed. The infant, startled, jerked his head away from the nourishing breast to look up at his mother's face. White milk and red blood dripped down his already jutting chin. "Durotan of the Frostwolf clan would not sit by and meekly let our people be led to their deaths like the sheep the humans tend. With what you had learned, you had to speak out, my mate. You could have done no less and still be the chieftain you are."

Durotan nodded at the truth of her words. "To know that Gul'dan had no love for our people, that it was nothing more than a way for him to increase his power...."

He fell silent, recalling the shock and horror -- and rage -- that had engulfed him when he had learned of the Shadow Council and Gul'dan's duplicity. He had tried to convince the others of the danger facing them all. They had been used, like pawns, to destroy the Draenei, a race that Durotan was beginning to think had not required extinction after all. And again, shuttled through the Dark Portal onto an unsuspecting world -- not the orcs' decision, no, but that of the Shadow Council. All for Gul'dan, all for Gul'dan's personal power. How many orcs had fallen, fighting for something so empty?

He searched for the words to express his decision to his mate. "I spoke, and we were exiled. All who followed me were. It is a great dishonor."

"Only Gul'dan's dishonor," said Draka fiercely. The infant had gotten over his temporary fright and was again nursing. "Your people are alive, and free, Durotan. It is a harsh place, but we have found the frost wolves to be our companions. We have plenty of fresh meat, even in the depths of winter. We have kept the old ways alive, as much as we can, and the stories around the fire are part of our children's heritage."

"They deserve more," said Durotan. He gestured with a sharp-nailed finger at his suckling son. "He deserves more. Our still-deluded brothers deserve more. And I will give it to them."

He rose and straightened to his full imposing height. His huge shadow fell over the forms of his wife and child. Her crestfallen expression told him that Draka knew what he was going to say before he spoke, but the words needed utterance. It was what made them solid, real...made them an oath not to be broken.

"There were some who heeded me, though they still doubted. I will return and find those few chieftains. I will convince them of the truth of my story, and they will rally their people. We shall no longer be slaves of Gul'dan, easily lost and not thought of when we die in battles that serve only him."

This I swear, I, Durotan, chieftain of the Frostwolf clan!"

He threw back his head, opened his toothy mouth almost impossibly wide, rolled his eyes back, and uttered a loud, deep, furious cry. The baby began to squall and even Draka flinched. It was the Oath Cry, and he knew that despite the deep snow that often deadened sound, everyone in his clan would hear it this night. In moments, they would cluster around his cave, demanding to know the content of the Oath Cry, and making cries of their own.

"You shall not go alone, my mate," said Draka, her soft voice a sharp contrast to the ear-splitting sound of Durotan's Oath Cry. "We shall come with you."

"I forbid it."

And with a suddenness that startled even Durotan, who ought to have known better, Draka sprang to her feet. The crying baby tumbled from her lap as she clenched her fists and raised them, shaking them violently. A heartbeat later Durotan blinked as pain shot through him and blood dripped down his face. She had bounded the length of the cave and slashed his cheek with her nails.

"I am Draka, daughter of Kelkar, son of Rhakish. No one forbids me to follow my mate, not even Durotan himself! I come with you, I stand by you, I shall die if need be. Pagh!" She spat at him.

As he wiped the mixture of spittle and blood from his face, his heart swelled with love for this female. He had been right to choose her as his mate, to be the mother of his sons. Was there ever a more fortunate male in all of orc history? He did not think so.

Despite the fact that, if word reached Gul'dan, Orgrim Doomhammer and his clan would be exiled, the great Warchief made Durotan and his family welcome in his field camp. The wolf, however, he eyed with suspicion. The wolf eyed him back in the same manner. The rough tent that served Doomhammer for shelter was emptied of lesser orcs, and Durotan, Draka, and their yet-unnamed child were ushered in.

The night was a bit cool to Doomhammer, and he watched with wry amusement as his honored guests divested themselves of most of their clothing and muttered about the heat. Frostwolves, he mused, must be unused to such "warm weather."

Outside, his personal guards kept watch. With the flap that served as a door still open, Doomhammer watched them huddle around the fire, extending enormous green hands to the dancing flames. The night was dark, save for the small lights of the stars. Durotan had picked a good night for his clandestine visit. It was unlikely that the small party of male, female, and child had been spotted and identified for who they really were.

"I regret that I place you and your clan in jeopardy," were the first words Durotan spoke.

Doomhammer waved the comment aside. "If Death is to come for us, it will find us behaving with honor." He invited them to sit and with his own hands handed his old friend the dripping haunch of a fresh kill. It was still warm. Durotan nodded his acceptance, bit into the juicy flesh, and tore off a huge chunk. Draka did likewise, and then extended her bloody fingers to her baby. The child eagerly sucked the sweet liquid.

"A fine, strong boy," said Doomhammer.

Durotan nodded. "He will be a fitting leader of my clan. But we did not come all this way for you to admire my son."

"You spoke with veiled words many years ago," said Doomhammer.

"I wished to protect my clan, and I was not certain my suspicions were correct until Gul'dan imposed the exile," Durotan replied. "Hi..."

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