



Starcraft: Twilight (The Dark Templar Saga, Book 3)

By Christie Golden

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Editorial Review

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. Golden lives in Tennessee. She welcomes visitors to her website: ChristieGolden.com.

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CHAPTER 1

We must go, Rosemary.

Rosemary Dahl's head whipped up at Zamara's voice speaking in her brain. She didn't think she'd ever get truly comfortable with such a method of communication, but after the last several minutes, when she and the protoss inside Jake's mind had worked together to repair the damaged warp gate, she was getting used to it. She fired one last time at the zerg, swarming far too close for comfort, even though their target was elsewhere, and let her gaze linger for just a second on the glowing darkness that was lumbering toward them.

They'd come here because of Zamara, the...spirit, Rosemary guessed was the best word, of a dead protoss preserver who housed every memory every protoss had ever had. And among those memories was something so important that Zamara had been determined to find a way to continue on after death -- to share those memories with one Jacob Jefferson Ramsey, archaeologist, who was now possibly going to die because of those memories. Zamara had brought them here to locate a fragment of an extremely pure and powerful crystal, thinking to save Jake's life with it.

All well and good, but they hadn't counted on a lot of things. They hadn't counted on finding two separate and determined protoss factions practically at war with one another. They hadn't counted on Valerian Mengsk, son of Emperor Arcturus Mengsk and Rosemary's employer-turned-hunter, tracking them here. They hadn't counted on confronting Rosemary's former lover Ethan Stewart, seemingly raised from the dead and horrifically modified by someone he referred to as the "queen," leading a pack of zerg. And for *sure* they hadn't counted on discovering that one of the protoss factions -- the Forged -- was being controlled by a monstrosity called a dark archon.

An entity comprised of seven of the deadliest assassins in the history of the dark templar, his name was Ulrezaj. Dark archons were an abomination to the Aiur protoss, and Rosemary had her own deeply personal grudge against the thing out there. The misguided followers of the monstrous being had dredged up the very worst parts of her, the parts she had thought she'd shed long ago. They had captured her and smeared some kind of drug they called "Sundrop" on her skin, and she'd toppled immediately back into the dark pit of addiction. Her eyes narrowed even now as she recalled what the drug had done to her.

She tore her mind from the memory and focused on the pleasant image in front of her. Attacked on three

sides, he was stumbling now, the oh-so-mighty Ulrezaj, and her heart leaped to see it. More than anything she could recall wanting -- well, wanting with a clear head at any rate -- she wanted to see Ulrezaj die, fall beneath the chittering living carpet of zerg, the powerful onslaught of Valerian Mengsk's Dominion vessels, and the stubborn attack of what few protoss remained on Aiur.

I sympathize with your desire, but the gate will soon close.

Gotcha, Zamara.

Rosemary whirled and headed for the gate at top speed. Right before she plunged into its swirling, misty center, she called over her shoulder, "Jake, come on!"

Beside her ran the last few protoss to escape Aiur. Those who stayed behind would die. She knew it, and they knew it, and they were content with their choice. As for the gate, Rosemary wasn't sure what to expect. The ground seemed solid beneath her running feet the entire way, but darkness descended almost instantly. Rosemary clutched her rifle and slowed, unsure if she was through yet or not. The consistency of the earth seemed to change, become less firm, more like sand than hard-packed earth. It was still dark, but there was some source of light, dispersed and faint, like starlight. She could just start to make out the shapes of the protoss around her and --

HALT!

The order that slammed into her brain was so intense that Rosemary gasped and stumbled, falling into one of the protoss who had also come to a stop beside her. He caught her quickly and steadied her.

Information flooded her brain, a cacophony of mental shouting and explanations, and she bit back a gasp of pain. The protoss next to her squeezed her arm reassuringly. Good God, was this how it was all the time? Until this moment Rosemary hadn't fully appreciated how much Zamara had shielded her --

" -- from Aiur. There is one other who is still coming -- "

-- images of battle, of death, of Ulrezaj, of dead protoss lying in the chambers beneath the protoss homeland --

" -- zerg and a dark archon -- "

" -- Sundrop, a despicable drug -- "

"Zerg?"

Rosemary winced at the horror emanating from the protoss who surrounded the little band of refugees; she knew now that they were surrounded here, wherever "here" on Shakuras was.

"What were you thinking? Zerg? You'll lead them here! Redirect, redirect and then shut it down!" Rosemary shoved her way through the press of protoss surrounding her; they were too tall and she couldn't see these new protoss who were --

Clarity struck her like an armored fist as she suddenly made sense of the jumble of words and images with which her poor human, non-psionic brain was being bombarded. They were going to close the gate.

Which would leave Jake stranded on Aiur.

"No!" she shrieked. Rosemary lunged for the nearest protoss, seizing his arm. His head whipped around and he stared at her, and she got a hint of just how alien she must appear to these beings. Unlike the refugees who had just raced through the warp gate, these protoss were fit, healthy, and armed to the teeth -- well, they would have been if they'd had any teeth. The templar she'd dared lay hands on freed himself easily and backhanded her, training his weapon on her as she fell hard on soft sand. The wind knocked out of her, she gasped inelegantly like a fish, staring up at a purple sky that was not quite day and not quite night, still instinctively and foolishly trying to form words when intellectually she knew that thoughts would do as well or better.

Bless them, the other protoss rallied. The one who'd caught her before -- Vartanil, she thought his name was -- now gently helped her to her feet, while the others shot streams of information to the guards of the warp gate.

"You must open the gates, if only briefly!" Vartanil was saying. "There is a terran male named Jacob Jefferson Ramsey still on Aiur. He houses within him one of the last preservers."

The guard who'd struck Rosemary gazed coldly at Vartanil. "The hardships you have endured over the last four years must have damaged your mind, Vartanil."

Rosemary wondered as breath finally came back to her how the guard had known Vartanil's name. Oh yeah -- that instant thought stuff. And even as that realization hit, she found that she knew the guards' names as well. This bully, his skin dark gray and his face angular and dotted here and there with sharp, small hornlike protrusions, was Razturul. The other was Turavis.

"He's right," Rosemary said, "and it's a hell of a long story. Zamara will tell you, but first you need to open this damned *gate*!"

She was astonished at how upset she was at the thought of Jake being stranded in Aiur. Or being taken by Valerian or Ethan or reduced to a little cloud of atoms by Ulrezaj. He didn't deserve to wind up that way, not after all he'd been through. And whatever little mysteries Zamara had locked in her dead-but-yet-still-living consciousness were obviously very important to the protoss.

Razturul's eyes, glowing in the dim light of a twilight evening, narrowed as he regarded her. "It is true that you all tell the same story," he acknowledged, obviously reluctantly.

"Yes, Razturul, but none of them can enter the Khala, so we cannot verify their claims in a place where there can be no deception," said Turavis. His face was smoother than the bully's, and his nerve cords, neatly pulled back and tied, hung down to his waist.

Razturul pointed at Vartanil. "This one claims that the protoss you have brought with you, terran, have been subjected to a drug called Sundrop." His eyes widened slightly as, unbidden, Rosemary recollected the abject shame and self-loathing she'd endured while in the throes of that wretched drug. "Ah, you, too, claim to have been addicted."

"No claim about it," Rosemary muttered. She fought back her anger and fear. "Please," she said, a word she did not often use. "My friend and the preserver he houses are in terrible danger. Just open the gate for a second."

"It is too late," Turavis said, compassion lacing his words. "But if it is any consolation, your friend has been redirected to another gate."

Rosemary looked at him, uncomprehending.

"The warp gates are xel'naga technology, and they can be found on many worlds," Turavis continued. "Any warp gate can open onto any other active gate. When we saw that there was a risk of invasion -- by zerg, or the Dominion, or this dark archon -- we redirected anyone who was already within the boundaries of the gate to another one. Jacob will have walked through the gate thinking to arrive on Shakuras, as you have, but instead will find himself in another place entirely."

Rosemary gaped at him. "Oh, great. Can you tell which one?"

Razturul shook his head. "No. While it is not entirely random, there are still many possibilities. The redirection is designed so that if it is an enemy, they will not be sent anywhere that they could do harm to our people, but if it is one of our own, they will be able to survive."

"Well, yeah, but in case you haven't noticed, bud, I'm not a protoss. What about toxic atmospheres? What about predators? What about food? We humans can't live on sunlight like you guys can."

"You said he is with a preserver," Razturul said, casting a slightly disapproving glance at Vartanil. "If this is true, then she will be able to program the gate to take them somewhere else, if where they are is inhospitable. Do not worry about him, Rosemary Dahl. I would think you should be more worried about you..."

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