

Terranova

Terranova

VOLUME ONE:

The Black Petaltail

Martin W. Lewis

Copyright © 2009 by M. W. Lewis

This is a work of fiction and, as such, it is a product of the author's creative imagination. All names of characters appearing in these pages are fictitious except for those of public figures. Any similarities of characters to real persons, whether living or dead, excepting public figures, is coincidental. Any resemblance of incidents portrayed in this book to actual events, other than public events, is likewise coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted by any means—whether auditory, graphic, mechanical, or electronic—without written permission of both publisher and author, except in the case of brief excerpts used in critical articles and reviews. Unauthorized reproduction of any part of this work is illegal and is punishable by law.

ISBN:978-0-615-26028-0

Contents

∞ Chapter 1 ∞	1
Shanna's Dream	1
∞ Chapter 2 ∞	5
Across the Waste	5

Dramatis Personae

Earth

Shanna Malone, professor of history, East Asian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University
Malcolm Harris, head geographer, General Imaging and Gaming (GImG)
Bowman Alexander (“**Xander**”), president and founder, GImG
Cassia Arkin, president and chief of operations, Institute for Imaging Technology (IIT)
Harleigh Kim, Bowman Alexander’s protégé
Liam Bohne, Cassia Arkin’s protégé
Merrick Harris, Malcolm Harris’s son
Sanjay Rajiv, Merrick Harris’s friend
Daphne Ashmond, professor of anthropology, Harvard University (Shanna Malone’s friend)

Terranova

Shunelians

Malan, novice monk (**Hex**, Malan’s bloodhound; **Harvest**, Malan’s shepherd)

Telarans

Tisha of Sherpu, traveler
Theelam of Goddayan, traveler
Kolta of Silazh, traveler (**Patience**, **Fidelity**, and **Steadfast**, Kolta’s guard dogs)

Kulgsh

Tribe of Sherchut (over Danirmatu)
Gatli (*Meles*), Lord of Sharen, commander
Dahil (*Ovis*), Gatli’s second-in-command
Awtu (*Gekko*), Gatli’s councilor
Tribe of Khuzh (over Plidam)
Eshat (*Crocota*), Lord of Gemd, commander
Pelg (*Aquila*), Eshat’s second-in-command
Naghil (*Leirus*), Eshat’s councilor

Koro (*Tremarctos*), Eshat's marksman

Alzhu (*Chordeiles*), Eshat's wife

Aved (*Danaus*), Alzhu's attendant

Tribe of Ghazhal (over Khorram)

Temish (*Corvus*), Lord of Dushgamy, commander

(**Skull** and **Gasher**, Temish's top war-dogs)

(**Khukimm** and **Numimm**, Temish's top crows)

Tribe of Shokud (over Golea)

Enim (*Masticophis*), Temish's sniper (temporary posting)

❧ Chapter 1 ❧

Shanna's Dream

(Cambridge, Massachusetts)

Shanna Malone struggled to recall her dream. It had been so vivid and emotionally wrought that she could not just let it fade away. The first image—it had been the first, hadn't it?—was of a multicolored bird flying gracefully, at times acrobatically, through a lush savanna landscape. The bird had lit on a branch, looked at Shanna, opened its beak and said, "Cause, what is the cause, cause, cause?" The "cause" had become "caw" as the enchanting bird turned into a crow. It was immediately joined by dozens of its raucous kind. The scene had been alarming, but the fear dissolved as the initial crow—was it the same one?—landed, stretched its wings, and stood up to emerge as a beautiful young woman. The naked woman was almost as dark as the crow itself. Her hair was long, lustrous, and jet-black.

At this point of the dream, the emotional register had shifted again, suddenly intensifying. Shanna had then felt suffused with a feeling of benign grace, as if the young woman had a kind of holy presence. But then the girl's dark face had grown anxious, her eyes darting around as if she were searching for something. Shanna thought, *She's looking for me. No, she's looking at me, but she can't see me.* The young woman raised her hands, feeling for Shanna's face, but her fingers remained a few inches away, as if in pantomime. Suddenly, her eyes locked on

Shanna's in recognition. The girl's eyes grew luminous for a second and then softened as she began to cry, softly at first but intensifying to piteous weeping.

Shanna rubbed her eyes, wondering if the vision could have any significance. *What a roller coaster*, she thought. She could not recall ever having been so gripped by a dream. She almost felt like crying herself. She ran it over a few times in her mind and decided to write it down, fearing that otherwise it would slip into oblivion.

But Shanna's concern was misplaced. Rather than fading away as she feared, the vision remained firmly fixed. Over breakfast in her condominium, alone as usual, she tried to clear her mind. Her eyes ran over the immaculate surfaces of her newly refurbished kitchen, hoping to find some small pleasure in the culmination of a project that had occupied much of her time and drained most of her bank account over the past year. But this morning the granite counters seemed nothing more than misplaced slabs of polished rock. Even the irises on her rosewood table appeared out of place, somehow less real than the flowers in the savanna of her dream. Instead of feeling soothed, Shanna was irritated. How could she have imagined that renovating an apartment would bring any lasting joy? The whole endeavor seemed pointless, an escapist fantasy.

But Shanna had had enough of wallowing in remorse. She busied herself making a pot of tea, but still she thought of her morning vision. Could the dream have any connection with the news she had received the previous day? It seemed unlikely, but what she had learned had been as momentous—and as jarring—as the vision itself.

Despite herself, Shanna's mind turned back to her current professional preoccupation, which was a business of such troubling intensity that she had remodeled her condo largely in an effort to keep her grip on everyday life. Terranova.

After countless hours of scrutinizing satellite images, Shanna would soon have an opportunity to see the planet close-up. Just yesterday, she had been invited to witness the first Terranovan surface projections at the world's most advanced imaging facility. The irony was not lost on her. Shanna had fought long and hard against the invasive surveillance of Nova, and she was still miffed that the detailed scenes would be captured and disseminated. But the battle had been waged, her side had lost, and the recordings would soon arrive. It was a

small consolation, but a real one, to be invited to the initial showing at Diablo. Terranova was, quite simply, the greatest discovery of her lifetime, perhaps of all history.

Shanna was relieved that the event was still a few months away. She had time to prepare for her inevitable encounter with Bowman Alexander, the most loathsome creature in her well-developed cabinet of demons. Not only would she see and hear him, she would probably meet him, too. Alexander was putting on the show, after all, and at no small cost. And Malcolm would be there, too. How awkward would that be?

Shanna rarely allowed herself to imagine how her life might have turned out if Malcolm had not abandoned her. Would she now be enveloped in the warmth and bustle of family life rather than facing nightly loneliness? Certainly she would not have risen so far in her career if she had been burdened with children. But the glow she could usually summon by contemplating her publication record did not have much power this morning. Instead she found herself returning to the last conversation she had with Malcolm, the one that ended their relationship.

She could still see the hillside on which they had sat, as soft and green as the one she had just witnessed in her dream. A glowing April afternoon in a northern California oak savanna in 2008, it had been a day as beautiful as the event itself was heartbreaking. Thinking again of the weeping girl in her dream, Shanna, too, began to cry. Her tears dropped into her teacup. Before long she was sobbing—sobbing for the first time since childhood.

❧ Chapter 2 ❧

Across the Waste

(Shunelia, Terranova)

Malan could not understand his master's injunction. He was not even permitted to speak to them? He certainly wanted to. They seemed kind, and they were more than interesting. They were also obviously of some importance. Why else would his mentor have been given the responsibility of escorting them across the waste and down the river?

Malan was equally disturbed by the fact that his master had not even told him the purpose of the mission. Why were they guiding three foreign women through the burned-over lands? Where were these Westlanders headed? Peering ahead, Malan tried to catch a glimpse of his teacher. But even at this distance, the sight of the confidently striding monk with his magnificent falcon perched on his left shoulder made Malan remember his place. He consoled himself with the knowledge that being invited on the expedition at all was a sign of his budding maturity, a kind of coming-of-age test. Malan was proud to play his part, however inscrutable it might be, in the struggle against the Kulgsh. But he wanted more. He always wanted more.

The boy hunched his shoulders to reposition the weight of his inner and outer packs and then shifted his pigeon to his left arm, which temporarily eased his discomfort. The bird remained calm, prompting

Malan to stroke its neck feathers in gratitude. Malan tried to ignore his sore feet and tired muscles, telling himself that he ought to be thankful for the fine weather of the late summer morning. But he could not do that. The rank vegetation was enough to sour his mood.

This had once been home, after all, before the Kulgsh had come. Now the pastures were overgrown with thistles, brambles, and shrubs. The browsing herds of animals that had once kept the vegetation in check had been either killed or driven off. Now the scattered nut trees stood dead, their great leafless skeletons silhouetted against the sky. Even the dogs must find it depressing. Malan looked down at Hex, who returned her usual droopy canine smile. Harvest, on the other hand, was trotting ahead of the convoy, scouting the trail with a few other shepherds. They seemed edgier than usual.

Failing to distract himself, Malan returned to his previous ploy: stealing glances at the foreigners. He knew little about women, having been initiated into the monastery when he was twelve, two years before it had been sacked and burned. The three years since that trauma had largely been spent on the run in the company of small groups of monks and laymen who continued to resist the invaders however they could. Having barely laid eyes on a female face since he left home five years ago, Malan found it remarkable that his first major military duty would be to help escort three women across the waste.

Having never seen a female Westlander before, Malan had not known what to expect. He had met a few of their men, and they seemed unexceptional. Most were tall, and many were odd of manner, to be sure. But these three! One was a giantess. Well over a foot taller than Malan, she towered over Malan's teacher as well. Her broad shoulders added to her formidable appearance. The other two were also tall for women, but not freakishly so.

Their oddity was in their skin, their hair, and their eyes. They seemed almost parodies of a normal person. The one directly ahead of him (there had been no introductions, and he had discerned no names) had the eyes of a cat—blue! Her skin was pinkish white and her hair so light it was almost yellow. The other one, walking now in front of the cat-lady, was as dark as her companion was pale, with jet-black hair and charcoal eyes. Malan had never seen anyone of either hue. How could both women be of the same place and of the same people? It was

to be expected that Westlanders were strange, but he had always imagined that their oddities would be in their ways, not their bodies.

These women's appearances were so unusual, Malan thought, that they were potentially frightening. Certainly he would be scared to encounter the giantess while wandering the waste alone, especially if she was with her dogs. The Westlanders' three guard dogs were gargantuan. They stood over three feet tall at the shoulder and were as heavy as a large man.

And yet, the women were oddly beguiling and even, in some unfathomable manner, lovely. They might be too outlandish to be considered beautiful, but they were certainly something to behold. And behold them was precisely what Malan wanted to do. That, however, was the problem. His master had forbidden him even to look at the women. For three days, Malan had trudged across the waste in a state of frustrated fascination. At least it helped keep his fear and boredom at bay.

Half an hour earlier, without warning, the dark one had sprung into the air to slash her spear at a hovering dragonfly. She missed the insect, but barely: her leap was impressively high. Why on earth had she done such a thing? The pale woman, the only other person to have witnessed the action, laughed lightly, and the two exchanged a few words in their own language. So strange.

Despite his mentor's command, Malan continued to sneak glances. Whenever he managed to meet their eyes, he got a smile in return, at least from the blue-eyed one. She had even tried to converse with him, but a quick look from his teacher told him that a response would not be tolerated. Malan noted that his master kept his own contact with the women to a minimum, exchanging few words and only with the tall one.

Malan's feet ached and his shoulders smarted. Surely they were overdue for a rest. He also wanted a drink. Although it was not hot, Malan had to repeatedly re-adjust his hat to catch fresh breezes on his sweaty head. He wanted to call out to his master to ask for a break, but that would not be allowed. Instead he looked to his bloodhound for sympathy. Hex's nose was up, sniffing the air. She seemed concerned. Scanning the northern sky, Malan noted half a dozen dark shapes circling. Vultures and condors, he thought, but then he saw a much larger form among them. It had to be a teratorn, and that meant they

were focused on something big. A fresh kill site in the vicinity? That was not a good sign at all.

Increasingly agitated, Malan could do nothing but keep trudging down the dusty trail. He thought back to the beginning of the journey. Before they even met the three Westlanders, Malan's teacher had explained why conversing with them would be prohibited. Speed was imperative to their mission: any delay could be disastrous. Equally important was the need to avoid detection. The Kulgsh could be anywhere in the waste, and even if they could not see or hear the band of travelers, their animals quite possibly could.

But the real reasons for the prohibition, Malan understood, went much deeper. No Outlander could really be trusted. Only the people of the land, those who shared in the covenant, could be counted on to do right. Only they belonged to the moral community, bound together in devotion to God. Outsiders could hardly be expected to lead moral lives. One might have to interact with them occasionally, even work with them, but friendship was out of the question. Malan's teacher had made it clear that they would do what was necessary to help these women across the waste but nothing more.

Malan knew that Westlanders were especially suspect. He had heard this his entire life, casually at first, but insistently after he entered the monastery, especially once he came under the tutelage of his present master.

"They may be our allies now," his teacher had recently spat out, "but they are hardly better than the Kulgsh. At least the Kulgsh are openly wicked. Westlanders hide their intentions. They may act in a civil manner, but they dissemble. They lie. They are never what they seem to be."

Malan kept ruminating on these prejudices as they walked the waste, wondering whether his master's warnings really pertained to these three women. The more he thought, the more his doubts mounted, and his internal conflict deepened. On one hand, he had to accept the wisdom of his master, his monastic order, and his faith. Without that, he was lost. Besides, there were good reasons to be hyper-vigilant about moral dangers in these times. God would not have loosed the scourge of the Kulgsh upon them—God's own people—were it not for their own lapses in faith and practice. But Malan sensed nothing sinister in these three women. And even if there was something twisted

about them, how could a mere conversation undermine his own solid moorings?

Malan reviewed the monkish case against the Westlanders as they walked the narrow path through the weedy growth. His eyes were trained on the back of the strange white woman directly ahead of him. The signal charge against Westlanders was that they had no religion—no true religion, at any rate. They worshipped idols, engaged in meaningless and sometimes depraved rituals, and prayed to a host of imagined deities (if not to actual demonic spirits). Not only did they fail to acknowledge the one true God, but they also stubbornly refused to listen to the truth when evangelized. Most Westlanders had some acquaintance with the scriptures, and many even claimed to follow the path of the Prophet Benevolence. But they did so in a twisted way, turning every verity into falsehood. This tendency to embrace the truth and then warp it, many said, was the Westlanders' most damning trait. It was one thing to be an ignorant savage worshipping devils, but it was quite another to accept and then pervert the gospel message.

Westlanders, to be sure, were nothing like the pagan tribes that lived in the wilderness areas of the north and south. Quite to the contrary, Westlanders were sophisticated, polished, and rich beyond reckoning. Yet their very civility and wealth were sternly held against them.

“They are a people defined by greed,” his teachers had stated. “They make nothing that honors God. They merely barter and truck, proffering idle luxuries to the weak-minded. They judge each other by the profits they hoard and look down on honest, God-fearing people.”

Malan knew that even his own monastery—before it had been sacked—had eagerly exchanged goods with Westlander traders. But his teacher refused to take this objection seriously. “You must understand, Malan,” he had condescended. “We live in a fallen world, besmirched with the great lie. As a result, we ourselves must traffic occasionally with evil. That is why we must fortify ourselves so strenuously. And that is why you must follow my lead when interacting with Outlanders.”

Without true beliefs, Malan had been informed, the Westlanders lacked genuine personal cores. “Dig deep, and what will you find? Nothing! They are chameleons, taking on the coloration of whatever place they find themselves. Such a trait makes them ethically perilous.

They may appear to be moral agents, but it's all a charade performed so they can worm in to take advantage of others."

Malan balked at the harshness of this and similar assessments. His own mother and father had never spoken so severely about the people of the West. In the monastic community, however, there were none but severe words. A few monks even blamed the invasion on them, though Malan saw no sense in that argument. Were not the Westlanders equally involved in the fight against the Kulgsh? Were not he and his teacher, at this very moment, risking their lives in the common struggle?

The day before they met the three women, Malan's teacher had subjected him to yet another lesson on Westlandian perfidy. "You must understand," his teacher had intoned, "that these people reject the distinction between matter and spirit. Therefore they go astray. Everything for them is topsy-turvy. They scorn sobriety, modesty, and obedience. They are flippant and foul. Even their elders laugh and cavort like children. Their men and woman take on each other's roles, never considering it inappropriate. Westlander women sometimes even bear weapons and fight—something you may well witness over the next few weeks. Equally important, true justice is foreign to them. Some sit on vast riches while others have nothing. They are always competing with each other, always trying to prove themselves better than the rest. They are proud and haughty, although they may pretend to be humble. It is our burden that we must serve them now, and you must take it as that—a trial!"

For his teacher, this was the real ordeal. To him, the dangers of the waste, where they were ever vulnerable to the arrows and animals of the Kulgsh, were trivial by comparison. Malan increasingly found this attitude puzzling. Their travel companions did not seem to be dissembling, nor did they appear tainted in any way. Malan saw no vanity or competition, no flippancy or foul manners. It was true that their conversations, which Malan could not follow, could be uncommonly lively and were occasionally punctuated with laughter. They also touched each other unduly, the pale one especially, reaching out to lay hands on the others. But their jokes and gestures seemed innocent enough. Malan could not make himself believe that these particular Outlanders were as nihilistic as his teacher portrayed them.

Malan also had to admit that he was intrigued, even excited, by some of the rumors of their customs. His teacher only hinted about the subject, being too upright to talk overtly. But other people were more open, especially the novices.

“Westlanders couple like animals, not humans,” one young man had whispered. “They take no marriage vows. They don’t even know who their fathers are!”

A particularly officious young monk had recently given a similar assessment. “The divine state of celibacy is unknown to our western ‘friends.’ Among them one finds no monks or nuns, and even their priests and priestesses copulate, sometimes in their own temples. Men occasionally sleep with men, women with women, and elders with the young. They are truly beyond salvation.”

The condemnation was universal: Westlanders were depraved. But Malan knew that he was not the only member of his order to find such innuendo as stirring as it was repellent.

Malan wondered about all of this as he walked behind the foreigners. He looked at the pale woman pacing ahead of him, noticing that the form of her body could be vaguely detected through her dust-colored tunic, which was cut too short above the odd leggings that most Westlanders wore. The soft-seeming fabric was probably made of cotton, quite in contrast to the rough wool of his own monastic robe. The woman’s attire, in short, was hardly modest. He knew that he was supposed to object, but he had to admit that it was not unappealing.

Entranced by the vision in front of him, Malan was caught unawares when the assault began. Everyone had stopped. The dogs stood poised, staring intently into the northern sky. Malan’s teacher signaled them all to duck into the weeds along the trail. Malan craned his neck to look overhead but saw nothing. Several minutes passed as his heart continued to pound. He knew he should not risk disturbing the vegetation, but he felt impelled to twist his body to better scan the sky for the approaching danger. Still, he did not see the dark shapes until they were almost overhead. An instant later, his teacher bolted upright, released his falcon, and began to shoot. Almost as quickly, two of the Westlanders released arrows as well. Malan fumbled for his bow and managed to get off two shots, poorly aimed. Several birds fell before the rest of the small flock retreated out of range.

“Drop your outer packs,” his teacher ordered. “We must move quickly now!”

No further commands were needed. The dogs took the lead, some on side trails, others running well ahead or behind. Malan wondered if he had the stamina to reach the river, which was still several miles away, before their enemies arrived. Surely they would come. Those birds had been Kulgsh crows.

It was awkward to maintain a firm grip on his bird while running. Tripping on a stone in the trail, Malan fell, but almost as quickly was scooped up by the giantess who ran behind him. Harvest, loping behind, saw the incident and rushed to his side. Malan’s ankle smarted, but he could still run, and he still had his pigeon. They could make it. No patrols were likely to be in the vicinity. His master had assured him of that. They would have time to reach the ruined monastery, descend the bluff to the river, and board the hidden boat. Once in the stream, the current would quickly carry them to safety. The rapids presented their own dangers, but he trusted his teacher’s ability to steer. All would be well: the path was clear, his master was capable, their Westlander companions could obviously hold their own, and he had the best dogs one could imagine.

A sharp bark banished Malan’s comforting thoughts in an instant. One of his teacher’s coursing hounds had emerged from a side path onto the trail in front of them and yelped twice, as if in pain.

“Halt and ready your weapons!” his teacher yelled while signaling his shepherds to advance and meet the challenge. “Harvest, too. Send her now!” he shouted at Malan.

Terrified, Malan complied, as did his dog. Crouching then to comfort Hex, Malan missed the explosion out of the weeds. Startled, he looked up to see a massive beast hurtling through the air to pounce on his teacher. They both went down. Sprite and Dancer lunged into the fray, honing in on the Kulgsh war-dog’s underbelly. Then everything happened at once. Another war-hound burst out of the trail-side scrub, only to be met in mid-air by one of the Westlanders’ guard dogs. The dark girl raised her spear to join the battle as a third enemy beast leaped at the giantess and the light-skinned girl, who was crouching behind her. This hound was met on both sides by the other two Westlander dogs and soon found itself being ripped and stabbed to death, its leather armor affording inadequate protection.

Next, Malan came under attack. He planted the butt of his spear in the ground and hunkered down, hoping to impale the springing beast on the sharp point. The war-hound's leap, however, was cut short by Harvest, who had somehow managed to latch onto its hindquarters. The enraged Kulgsh animal rolled over to dislodge her and then lunged, as if planning to finish off the shepherd before taking on her boy. Malan jumped in to protect Harvest, but his spear thrust was deflected by the Kulgsh dog's iron-studded jerkin. Suddenly, another attack dog appeared, this one even larger. It made directly for Hex and would have had her but for the talons that suddenly raked its face. One quick snap of the attack dog's jaws put an end to the monk's falcon. Malan now had his sword out, slashing wildly at the first Kulgsh dog. Harvest rallied herself, jumping on the dog's back and ripping madly into one of its ears. Then arrows began to thud into both of the Kulgsh war-dogs, easily penetrating their protective coverings. In less than a minute they were dead.

Malan's first thought was for his dogs. A quick inspection showed Hex unscathed and Harvest only slightly battered. He then trained his eyes across the larger scene, sickening at the sight. Five Kulgsh war-dogs lay dead, as did Dancer and Whiplash and his teacher, as well.

"No!" Malan cried. He ran for his master's body but was caught by the strong hands of the giantess.

"Stop, boy!" she shouted in her heavy accent. "Steel yourself now, grieve later. He is dead, and we must act. Check with your dog, your scent hound. We need to know if more might be coming."

Malan dropped to his knees to communicate with Hex. He gave the signals and watched her sniff, concerned that the wind was not right. "Come on girl," he implored, almost in tears. "Now's your chance. You have to prove yourself!" Her reply, however, was ambiguous.

"I'm not so good at dog reading," Malan mumbled, "but I think we're safe for a while."

"Very well. Your coursing hounds seem to agree. I see your pigeon has returned—quite remarkable. Affix the band with the proper message, and send it home. We will do the same with ours."

Malan complied with his shaking hands. When he looked up, the giantess was examining one of her dogs. Releasing it, she began to gesture while making the odd clicking and whistling sounds that she used to communicate with her pack. She turned to Malan again and

spoke. “Are you adequately bonded with your master’s dogs? Will they take your orders?”

Malan was not sure, but said, “Yes, I think so.”

“Good. Have one of the coursers stay well behind on the trail, and send the other to scout the northeast. Make sure the remaining shepherds stay close to us. And get that one,” she pointed at Sprite, “away from his master’s body. We can’t afford to have any grieving dogs either.”

Malan immediately set to work with his teacher’s hounds, pausing to reassure Hex and Harvest. When he had finished, the giantess said simply, “We must run faster now.”

