

# WARLADY



Jo Graham



## PRAISE FOR WARLADY

Graham skillfully combines a murder mystery, political intrigue, and space combat in the intricate and thrilling second Calpurnian Wars space opera (after *Sounding Dark*). // Graham fashions an elaborate and fascinating world, complete with complex history, religion, and politics, without ever sacrificing the plot's forward momentum. This polished page-turner should hook any sci-fi fan. — *Publishers Weekly*

I love the rich, complicated world of the story, but it's the characters that really grabbed me: competent, clever, complex people, survivors who keep fighting for each other despite murder and invasion and all the rules of their culture. This one goes into the special group of books I keep to read and re-read. — Melissa Scott, legendary pioneering SFF author of more than thirty novels, winner of multiple genre awards

Thrilling battles in space, a murder mystery, a forbidden romance, and mature characters working to change their world, all set within another of Graham's fascinating cultures in her Nine Worlds, where far-future space opera meets spirituality with the flavour of classical antiquity—*Warlady* is a worthy sequel to *Sounding Dark*, and a story that leaves one feeling ultimately hopeful that maybe humans can after all find their way towards making a better future. — K.V. Johansen, author of the *Gods of the Caravan Road* epic fantasy series

Jo Graham's *Warlady* deftly moves the action in her Calpurnian Wars series to the planet of Morrigan, where politics, intrigue, the threat of war, and ancient secrets threaten not only the future of Sandrine, bodyguard to the titular Warlady, but the fate of the entire planet as well. Graham expertly weaves the personal with the political, making the fate and stakes of Sandrine's old relationship with the electromancer Jauffre as important and grounded for the reader as the fate of their entire world. — Paul Weimer, SFF book reviewer and Hugo finalist

Jo Graham combines two of my favourite things: a big galaxy and a personal story. With gently delivered backstory, deftly rising action, and a gorgeous re-romance, *Warlady* is for everyone who wants to build a better world. — E.K. Johnston, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author

## PRAISE FOR SOUNDING DARK

Faith, luck, and grit propel this ambitious space opera from Graham (*Black Ships*). // Graham amps up the action, constructs a rich mythology of gods, cultures, and societies, and develops evocative characters that will make readers cheer. This pure sci-fi escape proves a fresh experience for fans who are tired of clichés. — *Publishers Weekly*

*Sounding Dark* is tremendously exciting space opera. // It's the sort of book you stay up far too late finishing, and then go back to re-read so that you can savor the details. The thing that's hard to express how well *Sounding Dark* blends solid technical SF // with deep myths. // Jo Graham makes both aspects utterly believable and equally crucial to the story. — Melissa Scott, legendary pioneering SFF author of more than thirty novels, winner of multiple genre awards



**Also by Jo Graham (selected works):**

*Black Ships*

*Stealing Fire*

*The Order of the Air*  
(series, Melissa Scott co-author)

*The Calpurnian Wars:*

*Sounding Dark*

*Warlady*

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For Amy,  
my Sandrine



## CHAPTER ONE

The doors of the Antechamber to the Presence stood open, the dim lights illuminating little besides the dark red hangings. Eternal starry night-sky glittered on the ceiling, constellations mirroring those of the sky without. The man who let Sandrine into the Sanctum was a Black Guard, with a neatly trimmed mustache and dark eyes; one of the youngest members, she thought, and not one she would have picked. “My lady Somatophylax,” he said, “The Chief Physician is here. And Sister Leonie.”

Over his shoulder she could see the Chief Physician and his assistants in a huddle around something on the floor, the pillar of the Presence pulsing blue with striations tending toward indigo. A slight figure bent toward it, not quite touching the couch, its white leather handrests blackened. “Why wasn’t I notified first?” Sandrine demanded. Her voice was harsher than she intended. “It is my place to guard the Warlady.”

“Sister Leonie sent for you as soon as she arrived,” he said. “I reported to the Hierarchy of the Black Guard.”

“And who found her?”

He swallowed. “I did.”

“And you did not see fit to summon me?”

“My lady Somatophylax....”

The slight figure had unbent, and Sister Leonie hurried across the patterned marble floor, her simple gray robes contrasting with

the sheen of the half-mask she wore, an open mesh of twining feathers in gold metal, a faint light chasing along them. She wore Windfollower, as she usually did these days. “Sandrine, I need to talk to you.”

Sandrine allowed herself to be pulled aside, past the young Black Guard, away from the cluster of physicians. One of them looked at another, shaking her head. Their bustle was ceasing. “She is gone then,” Sandrine said. It seemed impossible. “What happened?”

Leonie’s dark eyes looked up at her from between the whorls of Windfollower, her voice low. “This was not natural and it was not an accident.”

“What are you saying?”

“The Archegos was killed by a massive burst of electricity when she was in the interface to the Presence,” Leonie said. “She died instantly. But this was not an accident. There is no way the interface could have malfunctioned this way.”

“How could that happen?” Sandrine looked around her at the huddle of physicians. “I don’t believe it. The interface, the most secure place in the Sema... Why was she here? And wasn’t anyone with her?”

“The Black Guard,” Leonie gestured with her chin to the young man now standing alone and nervous by the door. “He was on watch outside her rooms. She asked him to escort her. And before you ask, he’s a Bar-Chanot from here in Holyrood. His father was in the Guard before him, but he’s only been in five months. Just enough for uneventful watch slots. She was electrocuted by the interface to the Presence itself.” Her voice caught. As long as Sandrine had served the Warlady, Leonie had been with her twice as long. Leonie had been Dariah’s protégé for nearly twenty years, since before Dariah had been Warlady.

“Leonie,” she began.

“Don’t. If you think it is your fault, how much more is it mine? I am responsible for everything in the Sema.” Leonie looked away.

Her hair was escaping from its pins into its natural curls. “Someone has assassinated the Archegos under our noses and we have no idea who or why.”

“This Bar-Chanot...”

“Seriously?” Leonie looked at her. “You think that boy has the subtlety to do this? No, whoever did this used the power of the interface itself. That requires a great deal of skill and knowledge. Someone had access to the interface and the ability to use it.”

Sandrine took a deep breath. For some reason her voice was not clear. “Then who? Someone high in the blood hierarchy.”

“I have no idea. We both know the Warlady had enemies. But one who could get into the Sema and use the Presence itself as a weapon?”

“A foreign power? The Calpurnians would do this if they could.”

“And can they? We have no indication they can. Of course they have agents, but to get in here and sabotage the very Sema itself? They have no Dreamers. I don’t see how they could have used the interface.”

Sandrine looked away from the knot of physicians. She was not going to look at the body. Her eyes met Leonie’s. “I don’t know who could do that. Or rather, I don’t know who could from a technical viewpoint and would have access. Have you tried to ask the Presence?”

“You think I’d go into the interface after what just happened? For that matter, this chair is completely burned out. The pads took so much current that they’re inoperable.” Leonie said. “And yet Windfollower senses nothing unusual. I have not tried a different interface elsewhere in the building. And no one shall do so until we find out how the Warlady was killed, if you were thinking of doing it yourself.”

“I was, but I won’t.” Sandrine shook her head. She had to be clear-headed. She could not think of the Warlady herself, not at

this time. “We need someone who can slice the interface without activating whatever the trap is.” She took a deep breath. “You there! Bar-Chanot! Orders for you.”

The young Black Guard almost tripped over his own feet hurrying to her. “Yes, my lady Somatophylax?”

“Send word to Sea Easting. I want Jauffre Castal-Edo brought immediately. The electromancer.”



The sea beat relentlessly against the walls of the tower, the stars above penetratingly bright, a night that never ended. It was more than two thousand kilometers to the beginning of the transitional zone, far out to sea, and on this tidally-locked world Sea Easting would never see a sunrise. Jauffre rose in the darkness, as he always did. He took his tea by the window. It did not open, but it gave a generous view of the white-capped waves occasionally punctuated by the pink or red lights of the kraken hunting just beyond the rocks where the river met the sea.

His tray had a warming dish for the thick potato porridge of the daymeal, the gravy ready to pour over it, double-ended spoon beside it, one end for the porridge and the other for the tea. Jauffre poured the gravy, then opened a paper-bound book propped on a wooden stand. Electronic readers were too much of a risk with electromancers, but paper was a tried and true way to read. In any event, this was simply a romance, not something worthy of being preserved eternally, a story of space pirates and wild adventures and forbidden love achieved. Not the sort of thing that the arguably finest electromancer in the world ought to waste his time on, but at his age and rank Jauffre could waste his time as he preferred. At least if it met with the approval of the Black Guard.

Jauffre grimaced. The troubles of the day would start soon enough. And to be sure, he had arranged things much to his liking

in Sea Easting, both for himself and the junior electromancers confined to the tower. None of them would go through the things he'd endured in his youth.

There was a deferential knock on the door. "Enter," Jauffre said. Perhaps the apprentice with the tray had forgotten something.

The door slid open. Two Black Guards stepped in, a woman of about thirty and a younger colleague. "Electromancer Castal-Edo?"

"I am." Jauffre got to his feet.

"Worthy, we have an urgent request for your presence in Holyrood."

Jauffre's eyebrows rose. An urgent request was a very polite way of phrasing a summons that could not be refused. "I see," he said. He could think of no recent transgression, at least not one severe enough to require a summons to Holyrood. "And to what do I owe this courteous invitation?"

Something was wrong. The young man looked at the woman, his brow furrowed. Her response was smoother. "A situation has occurred and your consultation is wanted."

"By whom?"

"The Somatophylax Dal-Vesta."

"Ah." Jauffre looked away, taking the time to carefully take a sip of his tea. If Sandrine had sent for him, it must be serious indeed. The Calpurnians testing the orbital defenses again? No, that made little sense given their current political confusion. An unpredicted political move in the College, one that made his position perilous? Or that made hers perilous? No, Sandrine was remarkably straightforward. She said she had no head for politics and she was right. He'd seen that in the last Calpurnian War eleven years ago.

"Worthy?"

"Of course I will come," Jauffre said. He gestured to his tray. "May I finish my breakfast first?" The expressions of confusion on their faces were priceless.



The flyer landed vertically in the outer courtyard of the great temple, maneuvering flawlessly between the gilded, pierced balconies alight with bright lamps. Jauffre unstrapped. It had been a quick flight despite Sea Easting being half a continent from Holyrood, though there was no time adjustment. There was no need for one. The entire inhabitable world was a single time zone since there was no diurnal cycle to confuse things. It was exactly the same time in Sea Easting as in Holyrood or for that matter nearly three thousand kilometers further west at Evening Point.

The co-pilot came around to open the door of the little flyer. Jauffre stepped down, his silver-gray leather coat sweeping on the step. He wore silver gray beneath it too: shirt and trousers, the silver sash across his chest from right shoulder to left hip the badge of his rank, tied off in a tassel of silver bullion fringe. He straightened to his full height as a junior officer in the deep indigo of the Black Guard came around to greet him. So did a Brother in the cream colored robe of the Sema. They looked at each other. "Well?" Jauffre said.

The Brother spoke first. "On behalf of the Hierophant of the Sema, be welcome to Holyrood."

The Black Guard glared at him. "You are the guest of the Lady Somatophylax, not the Hierophant. Be welcome to Holyrood, Electromancer."

Something was seriously awry. "I am delighted to be the guest of both worthies," Jauffre said. Every window was ablaze with light. It silhouetted the patrolling guards on the balconies. He felt his palms itch. One could not help but think tactically. So much energy, and so little discipline in its application. The energy flail at the belt of the Black Guard....

The Brother glared at the Black Guard. "My Lady Hierophant



has instructed that you be taken to guest quarters where you may refresh yourself.”

*After a flight of three hours?* “I assure you, I am in no need of rest,” Jauffre said courteously. “I understand the summons was urgent?”

“The Lady Somatophylax said that he was to be brought to her as soon as he landed,” the Guard snapped.

“Courtesy requires...” the Brother began.

The female Guard who had accompanied him during the flight had come around the flyer. “Security requires that he be restrained before being brought into the Sanctum.”

“The Somatophylax specifically said not to,” the other Guard replied.

“Our security orders come from the Hierarch. They are standing orders for all electromancers.”

“And our orders are direct and specific from the Somatophylax,” the first Guard insisted. Jauffre stood passively while they discussed whether to bind him or not. It was very instructive. “They take precedence over standing orders.”

“If he would follow me to guest quarters,” the Brother began again. The Guards ignored him.

“Then it’s on your head,” the female Guard said. “If someone else dies, it’s on you.”

“I assure you, I have no plans to assassinate anyone,” Jauffre said and watched them blanch. Very instructive indeed. Sandrine must be in quite a lot of trouble. “And I am prepared to report to the Somatophylax immediately if that is her wish.”

“Then I remand him to you,” the female Guard said. She turned back to the flyer. Jauffre nodded to the other Guard to precede him, leaving someone else to scramble after with his bag.

It had been several years since he had been in Holyrood, and forty years since he had first come here as a boy of nine, but the Sema was still as impressive. This time, however, he did not enter by

the main doors from the Pilgrim Way, but through back corridors tiled in white and gold, mosaics reaching nearly to the ceiling, every surface decorated with the work of hundreds of craftspeople. And these were the non-public rooms. They lacked the grandeur of the fire-lit First Sanctum or the eternal starry ceiling of the Antechamber to the Presence with its shifting murals of the deeds of the Warlord Khreesos who had built it.

“If you will come this way, Worthy,” the Guard said, starting up an ornamented staircase of green marble. Jauffre’s heels were loud on the stairs. There was a door with a Sister outside it, an energy pike in her hands. Jauffre suppressed a sigh. What sort of security was that if they feared electromancers? The presence of a guard with an energy weapon was an invitation, not a deterrent. Which meant that Sandrine did not fear electromancers, something that was also instructive.

The door opened onto a lavishly appointed private sitting room. There were deep couches in a plush emerald the same shade as the walls, marble side tables on metal legs, hanging lamps with glass mosaics of fantastic plants. A central table held a gilded tea service. A slight woman in the simple gray of the Sisters’ robes perched on the edge of one of the couches, a bowl in her hand, the tracery of one of the Greater Gifts a mask across her face. And yet his eyes were only for the room’s other occupant.

Somatophylax Sandrine Dal-Vesta wore the deep indigo uniform of a senior Black Guard, a color so dark as to be almost black, the color of Morrigan’s sunless skies. Her uniform was not plain, however—she bore the Warlady’s badge of ram’s horns across her breast. Her dark hair was pinned up in a single braid, her eyes lined with kohl, an energy flail at one hip and a blade at the other. She had been pacing, and she looked up at his entrance, her eyes bright with worry and unshed tears. As always, his heart gave a little leap.

Mindful of the Sister and the guards at his back, Jauffre bowed

deeply, his fist against his forehead in a sign of respect. "My Lady Somatophylax. I am at your service."

"Leave us," Sandrine said to the guards. "And put the bag down."

"My lady." They did so with sufficient speed to indicate a desire to be gone as quickly as possible.

Jauffre straightened up from his bow. Sandrine's eyes didn't leave him. "May I present the Hierophant of the Sema?"

The woman on the couch stood. She was slender with a heart-shaped face, her hair a lighter shade than her skin, a single ringlet on each side escaping from her severe hairstyle. "Please call me Sister Leonie. I have heard a great deal of you, Electromancer."

"And I of you, of course." Jauffre bowed again. "To what do I owe the honor of a meeting with the Archegos's two most trusted advisors?" They looked at each other, and Sandrine's expression gave him the final piece. "She is dead then," Jauffre said.

"Assassinated," Sandrine said.

"In the Sanctum itself. By the interface to the Presence," Sister Leonie said.

No wonder the entire place was buzzing like a kicked insect nest. Jauffre frowned. He had only spoken with the Warlady Dariah, a few times in public; but he had thought well of her, especially of her more controversial policies in recent years. They had made her enemies, but who could argue with her claim of divine inspiration? She spoke for the Presence. If the Presence itself required a loosening of certain oppressive laws, who might contradict it? The Warlady had proved her worthiness in the last Calpurnian War, channeling the genius of Khreesos himself. And yet another fact stood out.

"By the interface to the Presence?" Jauffre said incredulously.

"She was electrocuted," Sandrine said starkly. "When she lay in the interface."

"How? That should not be possible...."

“We don’t know,” Sister Leonie said briskly. “That is why we have sent for you. Someone has tampered with the essential access to the Presence. We do not know who, why. We only know how, and that seems incredible.”

“But surely you have some ideas,” Jauffre said.

“I have hypotheses,” Sister Leonie said. “But nothing more. You are aware that she had many enemies, both at home and beyond our world?”

“I know the Calpurnians would like to add Morrigan to their empire,” Jauffre said.

“You fought in that war with distinction, as I recall,” Sister Leonie said.

“Such was my honor,” Jauffre said with a bow so that he did not have to look at Sandrine’s face. He would not cause her embarrassment for the world.

“The Calpurnians are only one enemy, though the most obvious one,” Sandrine said sharply. “Leonie, you know perfectly well Castal-Edo and I fought together. Now can we return to the problem at hand?”

“Has anyone tried the interface since?” Jauffre asked.

“No,” Sister Leonie said. She touched the mask she wore. “This is Windfollower, one of the Greater Gifts. It seems to be functioning normally. I have not tried to draw on the Presence, however.”

“A wise choice,” Jauffre said. Especially with a Gift that interfaced directly with her brain, he thought. He wouldn’t try it himself. And yet that must be the reason they’d sent for him. He took a breath. “You want me to do it.”

“We need an electromancer to slice the interface,” Sandrine said. “And you are the best.”

“In your opinion,” he replied. It could not help but bring a sideways smile to his face.

“You are the one who fears nothing,” she said.

“Ah. You mean you think I’m the only one who would slice into an interface that killed the last person who used it?”

“Just so.” He saw the corner of her mouth twitch.

“Then I suppose I have no choice.” He made a grave bow to Sister Leonie. “I will need an alternate way in. It’s quite possible that the trap is localized to the interface in the Sanctum. Surely there are other interfaces. The less-used, the better. Only a fool builds a house with just one door.” It was an old proverb, but nonetheless true.

“There are others,” Sister Leonie said. He noted she didn’t say how many. She looked at Sandrine. “The oldest one? In the Core itself?”

Sandrine nodded. “That one hasn’t been used in years. There has been no need.”

“The oldest would be best,” Jauffre said.

“Is there anything you require?” Sister Leonie asked. “Assistance? Tools? There are Gifts....”

“I have everything I need,” Jauffre assured her. He touched his temple. “It’s all here.”

“I told you he was arrogant,” Sandrine said to Sister Leonie.

Sister Leonie laughed, then stopped short as if sorrow had suddenly caught her again like a fist to the belly. “Sandrine, would you take him down to the Core? I fear someone must speak to the nets. Rumors are spreading. There needs to be official word.”

“And that had better not be me,” Sandrine said. “You’re far more manipulative.”

“You mean diplomatic,” Sister Leonie said.

“As soon as the word reaches Calpurnia, they’ll try our defenses,” Jauffre said.

“I know that. The Hierarch knows that,” Sandrine replied. “He’s in communication with the orbital stations now.”

“Then lead the way.”



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Jo Graham is the author of twenty-five books and three online games. Best known for her historical fantasy novels *Black Ships* and *Stealing Fire*, and her tie-in novels for MGM's popular *Stargate: Atlantis* and *Stargate: SG1* series, she has been a Locus Award finalist, an Amazon Top Choice, a Spectrum Award finalist, a Romantic Times Top Pick in historical fiction and a Lambda Literary Award and Rainbow Award nominee for bisexual fiction. With Melissa Scott, she is the author of five books in the *Order of the Air* series, a historical fantasy series set in the 1920s and 30s. She is also the author of two pagan spirituality books. She lives in North Carolina with her partner and is the mother of two daughters.



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