

The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble - Part 5: New Horizons

by [The Space Witches](#)

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Galen has made good on his promise.

Epilogue

November 2269

Gideon awoke slowly from a deep, peaceful sleep. It was the sort of sleep he'd only began to have again since sharing his bed every night, the sort of sleep that left him feeling refreshed, alert and looking forward to the day ahead. This time, however, he didn't wake himself. He was aware of a tickling sensation at the end of his nose that made him want to sneeze. Gideon wrinkled his nose, and lifted his hand to swat whatever was tickling him, without opening his eyes. He felt his hand being gently caught and turned, then soft lips being pressed to his palm, and gentle kisses placed along his fingers, back across his hand and down his wrist.

The Captain smiled, his eyes still closed, but now completely awake, wondering just where Deborah

planned to go with her kisses. She had worked her way up his arm to his shoulder, would she go up or down? He found that he didn't really mind, as long as she didn't stop. Gideon smiled to himself again as the kisses trailed up his neck, and soft lips started to suck gently on his earlobe. He turned his head slowly, while reaching up to run his hand up his wife's spine and neck, to the back of her head. Then he pulled her head down into a long, slow, but passionate kiss. When he finally released her mouth, Gideon opened his eyes, lazily.

"Good morning." He murmured the words as he gazed into the warmest golden-brown eyes he had ever seen. Never in his life had anyone looked at him in that way; total love, commitment and passion all mixed together into one soft look.

Deborah smiled back at him and whispered, "Happy anniversary."

Gideon raised an eyebrow. "Anniversary? Did I miss something?" He quickly ran over significant dates in his mind. They'd met *over* a year before, their son had been born *less* than a year before, in fact they hadn't even *been* together at this time a year before, it wasn't anywhere near his or her birthday, so what was the occasion?

"We've been married for one month today. Here." Deborah kissed him gently and placed a package on his chest. Gideon looked down at the square, gift wrapped parcel, then back up at his wife as she continued. "This was supposed to be a wedding present, but things got a bit...well, you can have it now."

Gideon didn't know what to say. So he said nothing, just pulled Deborah's head down for another brief kiss, before pulling himself a little more upright in bed and picking up the package. Deborah shifted to kneel upright beside him, sitting back on her heels, her back straight. The Captain dragged his eyes away from her breasts, which her current position, shoulders back, seemed to emphasize quite unnecessarily. He resisted the urge to reach out and fondle them, and started to open his gift. Before he got the wrapping completely undone, he looked up at his wife again. "I didn't get you anything. I didn't even get you a wedding present." He knew that she understood the reasons for that. He was still broke, his back pay still well overdue.

Before he could say more, Deborah leaned forward and kissed him gently. "Yes, you did. You got me this." She held up her left hand and showed him her wedding ring, the ring that hadn't left her finger since he'd replaced it there a few days after their marriage.

Gideon reached out and took her left hand, kissed the finger with the ring, then went back to opening his parcel. When the final pieces of wrapping paper fell aside, he just stared at the contents, unable to believe what he saw in front of him. He looked up to see Deborah smiling, and then looked back down at the book in his lap.

"It's my book." He opened it gently, looking at it carefully, finding the slight mark on the contents page, which confirmed that this was indeed his copy, his book. The book that Deborah had given him nearly a year before. The book he'd had to sell to buy her engagement and wedding rings. Gideon closed the book slowly, careful not to bend any pages, and ran his hand over the cover. 'The Once and Future King.'

The Captain felt his eyes burning, as he looked at the title and author's name. He'd loved this book, and not just because he loved all books. Not even because it was the story of King Arthur and his sword Excalibur, but mostly because Deborah had given it to him when he'd first found out that she was pregnant with their son. This book was forever associated in Gideon's heart and mind with those

precious days when he'd fallen in love with Deborah, the visit when he'd really got to know who she was, when he'd found out that she wasn't just a beautiful woman with whom he could have great sex. He'd found that she was warm, funny, intelligent, kind, generous, downright cranky in the mornings if she didn't get enough sleep, and she had a strong dislike of heights. Very strong. It had nearly broken Gideon's heart to sell his book, but it was the only way he could raise the money to buy Deborah the rings he'd desperately wanted to give her.

Gideon swallowed hard and looked up at his wife. He managed a single word as he looked at her, watching the tears falling down her cheeks, as she shared his emotion. "How?"

Deborah smiled and wiped away her tears. "Max helped me." She went on to explain how during the month they had waited for the Excalibur to return to Eriadne, Max had sent messages out to contacts he knew, and they had eventually tracked down the dealer Gideon had sold the book to. Deborah had arranged for an agent on Mars, again provided by Max, to buy the book from the dealer before it was sold on. The book had arrived on Mars a few days before the Excalibur, and had been waiting for her to complete the deal when they got there.

"I swapped it for another couple of books. Max told me that I could have got much more for the books I traded, but I didn't care, I just wanted this one back." Gideon listened as she explained, all the time looking down at his book, gently stroking the cover. He couldn't believe that she had gone to such lengths to recover his book for him, or that Max had done so much to help her, never saying a word.

Gideon looked up abruptly. "If Max knew about this, then I guess Ilas and Dureena knew too, and if they knew..." He trailed off as the smile on Deborah's face grew, and she leaned forward to kiss him again.

"Everyone knew. Luke even helped me choose the books to trade. He said he thought you'd appreciate my trading 'Justine' and 'Juliette' to get your book back."

Gideon roared with laughter. "Is that the going rate? Two Marquis de Sade for one T H White?" He carefully placed the book by the side of the bed and reached out for his wife, pulling her tightly into his arms and kissing her passionately again. They slid down the bed and held each other close. When Gideon finally pulled his head back, he looked into Deborah's eyes and smiled. "Thank you, and happy anniversary. So we survived a whole month. Think you can stick it out for another one?"

Deborah grinned and lifted her hand to push back a lock of hair that had fallen over his eyes. "Another month? Hell, I've started planning the guest list for our Golden Wedding anniversary party. How would you feel about a celebration orgy?"

Gideon laughed, wondering how life could get any better than it was right at that moment. "Well, as I'll be ninety-three by then and you'll be in your early eighties, maybe we'd better plan on only making love three or four times that day, or we'll never be able to keep up with our guests." He was leaning back to kiss her again, when his commlink sounded, and Deborah echoed his own groan of annoyance. He rolled over and grabbed the wristband from the bedside table, raising it to his mouth. "Gideon. Go."

Lieutenant Jackson's voice emerged. "Sorry to wake you, Captain, but we just had a call come in from Galen. He says he'll be here in an hour. I thought I'd better warn you."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Call me again when he's preparing to dock, will you?"

"Aye sir." With that crisp acknowledgment, the line went dead, and Gideon rolled back to face his wife.

"OK, we've got about forty minutes, before I have to be up. What do you want to do with that time?" He grinned lasciviously at her.

Deborah grinned back, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "I'm damned if I'm waiting forty minutes for you to get up."

Demon sat with Marcus held against the towel on her shoulder, where he was crying and drooling. He'd been crying since he'd woken just after Matthew had left, half an hour earlier. The baby's cheeks were flushed and he was miserable, signs Demon recognized from her reading. He'd shown no interest in food, yet another sign of what the problem was. He was teething. She had rubbed a mild analgesic and some ice on his gums and was now concentrating on sending soothing sensations through their link, but she was very aware of how much discomfort Marcus was experiencing. [That's the downside of the link. What he feels, I feel.] Just at that moment, Demon felt like ripping all her own teeth out. At least, her efforts had managed to reduce his cries to a quiet whimpering, rather than the full scale screaming with which he'd greeted the day.

The touch of her sister's mind came as a welcome distraction. Angel sent, *[[The Captain told me to come see you, so I'm on my way. Will you open the door?]]*

Demon called, "Open," just as her sister arrived outside.

Angel walked into the room and came immediately to sit by Demon on the sofa, reaching out to feel the baby's forehead. "Is there anything I can do? The Captain said to meet him here, but he didn't say why. Is this why he called me?"

Demon shook her head. "No, this only started after he left, but he does have a name, you know. He isn't just 'The Captain'." Demon worried about the uneasy truce that seemed to exist between her sister and her husband. They were polite to each other, but not friendly, and it bothered her.

Angel sighed and dropped her gaze into her lap, where she twisted her hands together. "Demon, I can't afford to think of him as anything other than 'The Captain'. I'm supposed to be a member of his crew. I don't know if you realize what a privilege it is to be on the Excalibur. There are a lot of people who fought hard to be here. Some of them resent me, because they don't think I earned my place. Every day, I have to prove to them that I deserve to be here, and if I start calling the Captain, 'Matt', then I just reinforce the fact that I only got my job because I'm his sister-in-law."

Demon reached out to touch her sister's hands. "I'm sorry, Angel. I hadn't realized that it was so hard for you. I wish there were a way that you could live your own life..."

Angel's head came up, and she glared at her big sister, interrupting her. "Don't say that! This is my home now, and I'm not leaving!" Angel took a deep breath, calming herself and continued. "Well, if the Captain didn't want me here to help you with Marcus, why am I here?"

Demon frowned, wondering how her sister would react to her news. "Galen is back."

Angel jumped in her seat, visibly startled. Her face showed her fear, her hope, and her struggle not to let that hope build too far. "Do you know...?" Angel trailed off half way through her sentence, apparently not having enough breath to finish.

Demon leaned forward to squeeze her sister's hands more tightly. "All I know is that he arrived half an hour or so ago. Matthew went to meet him, then called me a little while back to say they were both on their way here, and that he'd asked you to join us. Now we have to wait." She sighed and moved her hand to stroke the baby's head. His whimpers had become steadily louder as she spoke. "In the meantime, if you have any ideas on how to stop this little one's gums feeling as if they're about to spontaneously combust, I'd be eternally grateful." Demon rocked her son gently, kissing the top of his head, and pouring calm and soothing feelings through their link.

Angel smiled and reached out to stroke the baby's hair. "I never thought I'd see you acting so maternal, Demon. On Eriadne, when the village women had babies, you used to go down to visit, stand as far back as you could, say 'Very pretty', hand over a gift and flee as if the hounds of hell were behind you. It must be true that it's different when you have one of your own."

Demon smiled at her sister. "Maybe, but it's mostly because this little boy has his father's looks, and I never could resist those big, hazel-brown eyes." She kissed the baby's head again and tried to calm him. Both women turned as the door opened.

As soon as Galen walked into the room, his eyes were drawn to Angel, sitting by her sister, her hand still gently touching the baby's head. To Galen, Angel had always been beautiful, even when painfully underweight and exhausted, as she'd been when he last saw her. Now, she had regained most of the weight she'd lost, her blue eyes sparkled with life and vitality again, and her hair shone with health and vigor. It was still shorter than it had been, but the style suited her.

Galen felt his heart turn over within his chest, and he reminded himself that she would never be more to him than a friend. No matter how much that reality hurt, he had to make himself accept it. He knew that if he ever tried to make their relationship more intimate, he could drive her away from him completely. The Technomage told himself sternly that Angel's friendship meant too much to him to risk jeopardizing it.

His attention was finally drawn away from the beautiful young witch by the crying of the baby. Galen realized that the child had been screaming since he'd entered the room, and while his attention had been focused entirely on Angel, Matthew had gone to take the child from Demon.

"What's the matter with him? Have you called Luke?" Matthew sounded deeply concerned, as he held his son to his shoulder and rocked him gently, trying to calm the baby's cries.

Demon smiled gently and hurriedly placed the towel over Gideon's shoulder, before Marcus could dribble onto his uniform. "He's just teething. It hurts and he's not very happy about it, but he'll live. I'm not sure that I will, though. I have this overwhelming desire to bite down hard on anything I can get into my mouth." Her smile turned mischievous.

Gideon looked at his wife and raised an eyebrow. "Thanks for the warning, I'll bear that in mind."

He gently pushed a finger into his son's mouth to see what the problem was and Demon called out, "Matthew, be careful!"

Galen suppressed a laugh as the Captain yelped, when his son bit his finger. The Technomage commented laconically, "Matthew, that's a little like putting your finger into a socket to see if the power

is on. Not advisable."

Ignoring the glare he received, Galen dug deep into one of the inside pockets of his voluminous black coat. "Now, I have something here that appears very timely... Yes, here it is." Producing what looked like a blue, metallic bagel from the depths of his pocket, he handed it to Gideon.

"What's this?" Gideon took it with his free hand and looked at it suspiciously.

"It's the Technomage equivalent of a teething ring. It emits a mild electrical field that numbs the nerve endings. Don't look so dubious, Matthew, it's perfectly safe."

They all watched as Gideon waved the bagel in front of Marcus' face, trying to attract the baby's attention. As it moved, it began to glow and shimmer, leaving rainbows of color in the air behind it. The child was captivated by the toy and reached out to take it from his father. Inevitably, it went straight into the baby's mouth and he bit down on it. Within seconds, the whimpering had stopped, and Marcus was smiling around the ring in his mouth.

Demon let out a sigh of relief and turned to Galen. "Thank you. You have no idea how much better that makes both of us feel."

Gideon muttered quietly, "Three of us, actually."

Galen laughed. "Well, as a birth gift it's a little late, but the opportunity didn't arise earlier. I'm pleased that it has proved suitable now." He turned to Angel, who had stood watching these events with a bemused smile on her face. "And I have a gift for you that has also taken rather longer to deliver than I anticipated, but I have it now." With a swift gesture that concealed a sleight of hand, Galen produced a data crystal from his sleeve, and handed it to Angel.

She took it from him slowly, almost reluctantly, before turning the blue eyes he loved so much to look up at the Technomage. Angel had to lick her suddenly dry lips, before she could whisper. "What is it?"

Galen smiled gently at her. "This contains the full confession of the men who killed Nikarran, and a record of your exoneration of all crimes on Mars. Your record there and elsewhere is now completely expunged. You are free to resume your true identity." He barely caught the young woman as she fainted.

Demon rushed to help the Technomage carry her sister to the sofa, where he laid her gently, as Demon pushed a cushion under Angel's head. The tall blonde looked up at Galen as he straightened, and glared at him. "You could have taken that a bit more slowly, you know. Or did you want this to happen? So you could play the hero and revive her." She watched as Galen's face froze, and Matthew hurriedly stepped in between them.

"Quit it. Deborah, that was unkind and uncalled for." Gideon's face clearly expressed his disapproval, even as he continued to hold his son against his shoulder.

Hurt at being criticized by her husband, but well aware that she had provoked it, Demon went back to tending her sister, kneeling by the side of the couch and stroking Angel's hair, all the while sending through their link. The sound of the door buzzer was followed by Lily's rapid entry into the room, as Matthew called for the door to open. Demon heard him mutter, "Perfect, now all we need is a cauldron,"

and glared at him again.

Demon and Lily gradually revived Angel, as Galen stood, frozen faced, watching them, and Matthew rocked Marcus gently in his arms. By the time Angel was sitting up and paying attention, Matthew had got the baby off to sleep and taken him through to his cot. Returning, he found the three sisters huddled together on the sofa, while Galen stood glaring at them from across the room.

"OK, can we call a truce? At least while Galen tells us how he got Angel off the hook. Maybe you sisters would like to remember that he didn't have to do that. He did it because he wanted to help. He's done some other things to help you, too, if you remember, including bringing Angel back into your link. Don't be so damned ungrateful."

Demon was shocked and saddened by how angry Matthew was. She could feel his irritation with her and fought hard to keep tears from her eyes. Part of her felt upset with Matthew for displaying his annoyance with her so openly, but another part of her knew that she had brought it on herself. She knew that she hadn't behaved rationally or kindly toward the Technomage, but she still struggled with her hatred of him, for taking her sister away from her and causing her and her sisters so much pain. Demon fought down her own anger and looked up at the Technomage. When she finally spoke, her voice was soft and low, totally controlled.

"I'm sorry. I should not have said that, please forgive me." Briefly checking through their link that her sisters were all right, Demon rose and started to leave the room, heading for her bedroom. As she passed him, Matthew put out his arm and caught her, pulling her close to him, then lifting his hand to caress her cheek.

Demon looked into Matthew's eyes, sensing his concern, feeling that his anger had drained away as quickly as it had arisen. He kissed her gently on the mouth and whispered, "Hey, don't go. I still love you, you know, even when I'm mad with you." Demon lowered her head to his shoulder and allowed him to pull her against his chest, hugging her tightly. Letting her hair fall over her face, to hide cheeks burning with embarrassment, she heard him speak to the others over her head. "OK, let's all calm down and listen to Galen's story. I'm sure it's a good one. Galen, why don't you sit down and tell us what you've been up to?"

Demon allowed Matthew to lead her to the single large armchair in the corner of their living room, where he sat, then pulled her down onto his knee, until he had her cradled in his arms, allowing her to continue to keep her head buried in his shoulder. She was aware that Galen had pulled out a chair from the dining table she and Matthew had introduced into her quarters, in place of the desk that had previously been there. The Technomage sat silently watching, as her husband gently stroked Demon's hair.

Angel was confused. Something had happened while she was unconscious, but she wasn't sure what. Whatever it was, Demon was upset and the Captain was now comforting her. Angel suppressed the shaft of envy that shot through her at the sight of how much Gideon obviously loved her sister. While she desperately wanted someone to feel that way for her, she would never again do anything to jeopardize what Demon and the Captain felt for each other.

Lily's mental voice came through their link, *[[Are you all right, Angel? We were worried about you when you fainted.]]*

Angel sent back, *[[I'm fine now, it was just a bit of a shock.]]* She was deeply embarrassed at having fainted, and couldn't remember the last time when she'd done that, but Galen's news had come so suddenly, she couldn't take it in. She turned to the Technomage and smiled softly.

"I haven't said thank you, but I really am so grateful. Thank you. How did you do it?"

Galen smiled back gently. "Are you sure you're up to hearing the full story?" At Angel's nod, he leaned back in his chair and stretched his long, leather clad legs out in front of him. "Well, if you're all sitting comfortably, I'll begin."

The Technomage went on to describe his initial meeting with the lawyer, Magnusson. "For some reason, he didn't seem very enthusiastic about helping me with my quest. He kept muttering that he'd only had one reason for helping, and now that she was gone, he didn't see why he should put himself out."

Angel turned to look at where her elder sister sat, across the Captain's lap, his arms around her. Demon had lifted her head to look at Galen while she listened, and the red flush that rushed to her cheeks was visible to them all, before she turned her head back into her husband's shoulder and let her hair fall across her face, hiding her features.

Gideon half laughed and said, "Yeah, well, I think we all know what Magnusson was after and it wasn't just my house on Earth. He must be pretty pissed off that he didn't get the woman he wanted or the house."

Angel was puzzled, *[What does the Captain's house have to do with this?]* She decided to leave it and question her sisters later.

Galen smiled vindictively as he replied, "Yes, he didn't seem too happy, but I found that the application of the appropriate incentive was sufficient to guarantee his cooperation."

Gideon laughed again, still stroking Demon's hair as she leaned her head into his shoulder. "That wouldn't be the same sort of incentive you applied to Lieutenant Carr, would it?" The Captain's smile nearly matched Galen's in its malice.

"Yes, Matthew. A very similar type of incentive, adapted for differences in anatomy, of course, and extended a little. It turns out that Mr. Magnusson enjoys the services of a very expensive courtesan on Mars. Well, when I say enjoys... until he agreed to cooperate in my search for the true killers of Nikarran, neither of them got much joy out of their association. There are certain times and places where the application of multiple electric shocks to sensitive parts of the anatomy are particularly unwelcome."

Galen's audience were all laughing by the time he finished telling them exactly how his Technocurse on Magnusson had taken effect. "I believe that the young lady concerned has given Mr. Magnusson his marching orders and told him never to darken her doors again."

The Technomage went on to describe his search for the murderers. "It took longer than I had anticipated, as the Loomwet brothers had gone to ground. It seems that when news of Angel's 'death' spread, they became concerned that the authorities might decide to look for someone else to prosecute for the crime. They needn't have worried. Lieutenant Carr showed nearly as much reluctance to reopen the investigation as Mr. Magnusson. I was forced to apply some further persuasion in that quarter too."

Galen described his and Magnusson's search through the lowest levels of Mars society, before turning to Angel again. "My dear, I have no idea how you managed to survive so long in such an environment. That you did so is a tribute to your intelligence, perseverance, and will to live." Angel felt Lily hug her gently and the touch of both her sisters' minds through their link, sending their love and concern.

Quelling the tears that threatened, Angel smiled softly at the Technomage. "I was determined that one day I'd find my sisters again. Nothing was going to stop me doing that." She looked first at Lily sitting next to her and clutching her hand tightly, eyes bright with tears, then across to Demon, who had lifted her head from Gideon's shoulder to look over at her younger sister, tears running down her cheeks even as she smiled.

Gideon lifted his hand to wipe away his wife's tears, and then kissed her softly on the cheek, before smiling across at Angel. "We're all glad that you held on long enough to do just that, Angel." His gentle smile made Angel's heart turn over, but again, she suppressed the feelings toward her sister's husband that constantly haunted her, then turned her attention back to the Technomage, as he described how he and Magnusson had 'persuaded' the Loomwet brothers to confess to their crime.

"I have to say that Mr. Magnusson was remarkably effective, once he'd decided that it was in his best interests to prove Angel's innocence. He was able to identify other members of the gang who had been present when the crime was committed, and even persuaded Lt. Carr to offer them immunity from prosecution in exchange for their coming forward as witnesses. Of course, the good Lieutenant had a significant incentive to cooperate fully with the investigation. She had no desire to repeat her previous experiences of offending a Technomage."

Angel dropped her head to conceal her smile at how smug and satisfied Galen sounded. After he had done so much for her, she didn't want to offend him. The Technomage went on to recount how Carr had taken the witness statements back to court, obtained warrants for the arrest of the Loomwets, and gotten their full confessions when they were eventually apprehended. "It transpires that they were wanted for a number of other crimes, including running a protection racket, blackmail and various illegal smuggling activities. The streets of Mars are safer with those two locked away, pending their 'rehabilitation'."

Angel shuddered as she remembered what the punishment for the crime of murder was on Mars, but told herself that the brothers deserved to have their personalities replaced for murdering Nikarran and for all the other crimes they had committed among the down and outs of Mars. She knew about enough of their offenses against the weak and poor of the Place of Lost Souls to know how much they deserved that punishment. She looked up again, as Galen continued.

"We 'persuaded' Carr that it would be a small repayment for the unnecessary suffering that she had caused Angel, to posthumously clear her record, including the charges relating to the illegal entry to Mars and using false ID. Carr wasn't enthusiastic at first, but she eventually saw the justice of our position." Galen's face was a picture of innocence as he said this, and Angel wondered exactly what 'persuasion' had been used. Again, she told herself that Carr deserved what she had got. The policewoman had known that Angel was innocent of the crime, but had proceeded with the prosecution anyway, just to get the crime cleared off her books. Justice *had* been done, and on this occasion, the end justified the means.

Galen leaned forward to smile at Angel again and gestured at the data crystal that she still clutched tightly in her hand. "That crystal contains the full court records of the Loomwets' trial and conviction, and the statement that the previous suspect, Angelique Denier, was cleared of all charges. I waited until

we had everything formalized before I told Lt. Carr that with the help of the technology aboard the Excalibur, and my own intervention of course, we had discovered that Ms. Denier was not dead after all, merely in a deep coma. I assured her that you and your sisters would be delighted by this news. For some reason, she did *not* share my enthusiasm about that."

Angel smiled back and whispered again, "Thank you." She really had no idea how she could ever repay the Technomage for his kindness, other than to let him know how grateful she was.

Galen turned to the chair where the Captain still sat holding Demon, and spoke, "I have a message for you from Mr. Magnusson, Matthew. He says that although he did not fulfill the exact letter of your deal, in that he did not secure Angel's acquittal, he believes that he has fulfilled the spirit of it. He wants your house."

Angel looked across at Gideon, finally realizing what Galen meant. The Captain had promised Magnusson his house to get her acquitted! Her heart started to beat more rapidly at the thought of Gideon doing that for her, and then she told herself sternly that he hadn't done it for her at all, he'd done it for Demon. But the thought that even a small part of his motivation might have been her well being, sent a surge of happiness through Angel. At that moment, she was grateful that her elder sister was unable to read her emotions, as she'd have been hard put to explain what she was feeling right then.

Gideon laughed out loud at Galen's comment. "Screw him. If he wants my house, he can sue me. I'd love to see him explain the deal we had, in court." Tightening his arm around Demon, the Captain smiled at the Technomage. "What Angel just said goes for all of us, Galen. Thank you. Now, much as I'm enjoying this, I have to go. First, I have a ship to run and second," he reached up to caress Demon's cheek and grinned, "if you sit here much longer, my legs are going to fall off. You're not exactly a featherweight, you know."

Demon punched his arm lightly and stood, letting the Captain rise from the armchair and join Galen, who had also risen and walked toward the door. Demon joined her sisters on the sofa, and they all looked up as the two men paused in the doorway. Galen looked at Angel, and she could see that his feelings for her were unchanged. She felt sorry for him, knowing that she could never return those feelings. One man--[Or perhaps two. The faces may be similar but the two men are so different...] Angel thought--had taken her heart and nothing would ever change that.

"Goodbye, Angel. Please take care of yourself. I'll be dropping by from time to time, so expect me when you see me." Galen lifted his hood over his head and left rapidly.

Gideon grinned at Demon. "You can expect *me* for dinner, but call me if you need any help with Marcus." He left the three sisters sitting together on the sofa.

The two Technomage ships touched at the front as they docked and Galen walked through the connecting passage, joining Alwyn in his study/control room. The two men looked at each other in silence for a while, then Galen spoke.

"Well, it's done. For better or for worse, the witches are now on board the Excalibur and a part of their mission."

Alwyn smiled at the younger man. "Oh, definitely for the better, I'm sure. It may be in our nature to

hate the creatures of the Vorlon, Galen, but we can fight that nature. Your friend, the Captain, needed to have his woman and his son with him, and his First Officer would have left Earthforce to be with his family if necessary. That would not be good for the fight that lies ahead, you know that. We need allies like Gideon and his crew. Was it very difficult to persuade Sheridan to let the witches join their men?"

Galen shook his head. "Not once I explained that the alternative was that Matthew and Lt. Matheson would resign and go to live on Eriadne. President Sheridan soon saw the sense of my proposal. He also feels a sense of obligation to me and to Matthew, so was happy to authorize the addition of close families to the Excalibur roster."

Alwyn's sigh was one of deep satisfaction. "I'm so glad it all worked out well. A shame that the charming little shape-shifter felt the need to leave, but the remaining three have the power to do what is needed, if and when it is needed. Let us hope that it never is."

The two Technomages stared into the flames of the holographic fire as they each brooded on the future.

As soon as they were alone, the three sisters stood and formed a circle, holding hands and allowing themselves to merge. The single merged entity thought, [We are three, but we are one. We can be one without our fourth. We are one, even when only three.] An invisible energy field started to expand around them, flowing through the walls of the Gideons' quarters and out into the ship. As the field passed through the crew, each one found themselves smiling, as a feeling of happiness suffused their minds and bodies. When the field reached the bridge, Gideon turned and smiled at his XO.

"My wife is feeling happy. I thought our quarters were supposed to be shielded though, how the hell is she sending that out?"

Matheson closed his eyes and focused his thoughts. Opening them, he shook his head as he looked at his Captain. "I think they've merged again, like they did after Angel was brought back into their link. Lily has a full telepathic block going. I guess that in the merge, they're powerful enough to break through the shielding. If that's the case..." The XO turned and looked at Gideon, speaking softly so the rest of the bridge crew couldn't hear him. "Matthew, if they can get through that shielding then they're a lot more powerful than I ever realized. I have no idea what they could do if they wanted to."

Gideon reached out to pat Matheson's arm reassuringly. "That's OK, John. They're on our side."

The field spread out through the walls of the ship and formed a protective shell around the Excalibur. Inside the Gideons' quarters, the sisters held each other tightly, as a white light flowed from Demon's mouth and eyes, swirling around them, enclosing them, caressing them, before retreating back inside the tall blonde's head.

The merged entity had one last thought, before it broke apart.

[We are three, but we are one. We have found our home.]

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The Witches of Eriadne: Cauldron Bubble

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