

# The Witches of Eriadne: Double, Double - Part 1: Arrival

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Lilith and Ilas by Lilith

## Chapter 2

Gideon sat in his chair on the bridge watching the view screen. Such a serene looking planet, beautiful. Just the sort of place the Technomages would choose to hide out... well off the beaten track, and if there were colonists already there, so much the better. They'd probably use them as servants.

Matheson's voice sounded over the speaker. "Leaving the Shuttle bay now Captain. We'll check in when we're five minutes from landing." Gideon nodded to the Communications officer to confirm. He smiled at the memory of the fuss Eilerson had made on his way to the shuttle. He kept telling everyone who would listen that he was too young to die. But Gideon knew that when the chips were down (and how Max would hate that cliché!) Max would come through for them. He might be a pain in the butt but he was their pain in the butt.

Gideon turned to the Sensor station. "Track their progress, I want to know if anything unusual

happens. And I mean anything!" The Sensor officer nodded nervously and watched her instruments intently. She wasn't going to be the one to get shredded by the Captain today.

Gideon sat watching the view screen for the next hour. He had a stack of reports in his file but couldn't concentrate on reading. He hated sending his crew into danger, far preferring to be there himself. And he would never forgive himself if anything happened to John. Oh, and Max, too... maybe.

The Sensor officer started in her seat. "What?" Gideon was at her shoulder.

"They're... gone" Gideon had grabbed her shoulder and was squeezing.

"Gone? Gone where?" She didn't know what to say next, and his hand was starting to hurt where it pinched her collarbone.

"I don't know Captain, they were there on the screen, then they were gone. Just gone." God, he was hurting her, but she didn't dare tell him. She couldn't help gasping when the pressure increased.

Gideon looked down and realised what he was doing. He released the woman's shoulder at once. How could he have done that? He'd hurt her without realizing what he was doing. Was he losing it completely?

"I want a full sensor sweep of the planet. As detailed as you can make it. And I want it now." His voice sounded calm and controlled even though he knew he wasn't calm at all. What the hell had gone wrong? This was his fault.

"Communications. Call the Sergeant at Arms, the Doctor and Dureena. Conference room. Five minutes. You have the comm." He swept off the bridge like a black crow alighting from carrion.

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Gideon was pacing again when Dureena arrived, quickly followed by Dr. Raven and Sergeant Healy. Dureena didn't think she had ever seen him look so out of control. He looked like he wanted to take someone, anyone, apart with his bare hands.

"Well, that didn't work." He spat the words out before they had finished sitting. "So now we go to plan B. Sergeant, assemble sufficient crew to fill 2 shuttles. Full assault gear. I want them ready for anything. And I want them ready in 30 minutes. Dismissed." The sergeant saluted, turned on his heel and fled the room. He'd rather face a fighting Narn than the Captain in this mood.

He turned towards the Doctor, but was interrupted by a voice from the screen. "Sensors reporting." Gideon span towards the image of his Sensor officer.

"Report."

"Nothing sir. Absolutely nothing. We can't even get the previous readings of the humanoid lifeforms. All we can read are the F band emissions. They increased by 400% at the same moment the shuttle disappeared."

"Thank you." Gideon turned back to the pair watching him. "I want you both aboard the shuttle. Doctor, I need you in case John and Max have been hurt. Dureena, we may need your 'unique' skills if they've been captured. Questions?"

They both shook their heads. There was nothing to say. "Then I'll see you in the Shuttle bay in 28 minutes."

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The first thing he noticed when he woke up was his headache. The second thing was the aching muscles in his neck, shoulders, and arms.

Max Eilerson opened his eyes and lifted his head, unable to suppress a moan when his neck muscles protested. He tried to see something in the twilight that filled this place. Gradually the different shades of darkness revealed some details, and he could see that he was in what looked like a big cellar. What little light reached this room came in one shaft from the wall above him -- probably a small window there. He slowly turned his head to the right and found that he was manacled to the stone wall. From the grade of the ache in his muscles, he deduced that he must've been hanging here quite a while. *[At least I'm sitting ... But how did I ever get here?]* He wondered, trying to collect his thoughts. *[Oh yes -- Gideon's mysterious Technomage planet... I told him -- hold on! Where's Matheson?]*

Max slowly turned his head to the left and found Matheson in the same miserable position as himself. He seemed still unconscious. Max was about to call out to him when he heard something from the door that he had noticed in the opposite wall. *[Sounds like a key in a rusty lock]*, he thought and looked towards the door just as it was opened. Two small figures entered - Max's jaw almost dropped to the floor when they stopped in the weak shaft of light. He had seen and dealt with many species in his life, but the two women who were standing there, although human or at least humanoid, seemed more extraordinary than all of them together.

The smaller of the two, maybe 5 feet tall, seemed to be the embodiment of "petite." She had furious red curls, flowing down to her waist and surrounding her pale face like a halo, and green eyes that made it hard to look away from them. Her clothes seemed to be a mix between gypsy and mediaeval style, with an emerald green bodice of a velvet-like fabric, its generous décolleté revealing a snake tattoo just at the inner base of her right breast, sleeves puffed at the shoulder and tight from the elbow to her hands, ending in a tip on the back of her hand, and a ground-length wide skirt of some flowing dark red fabric.

The other, slightly taller woman was still paler, almost like an albino, only her eyes were not red, but lavender, and had an Asian look to them. Her powder blue hair was piled up on her head. The full sleeves of her sapphire blue satin shirt were gathered at the wrist, with generous lace flowing out, and her legs were clad in tight black trousers. She looked almost fragile, with her delicate features and her child-like expression. Max's eyes darted to and fro between them, as if they couldn't decide where to stay. Then, the taller of the two started giggling and said, "Aren't they cute? Especially..." She threw a sideways glance at her companion.

The redhead sized him up and smirked, then went to check on Matheson. "He's waking up," she

whispered, squatting down before him and looking into his face expectantly.

Matheson uttered a guttural sound and carefully lifted his head. He slowly opened his eyes -- and found himself staring into a pair of incredibly green eyes. He jerked back so hard that he bumped his head on the stone wall. He couldn't prevent a loud "Ouch!" from escaping him. The red-haired woman squatting before him grimaced sympathetically and reached out to stroke the back of his head with her left hand.

"Ooh, my poor darling," she purred. Matheson couldn't tear away from her intense stare. Suddenly he became aware that she was leaning very near to him... [*I must be dreaming! This can't be true; I must be lying in bed on board the Excalibur --*] But before he could finish the thought, the woman covered his mouth with her soft lips, sending lightning bolts through his body as she kissed him ferociously. Before he had the chance to react, she broke contact and stood, leaving him to gape up at her.

"I'll see you later, Sweet-Face. We have to welcome your friends appropriately," she said with a voice that sounded sweet and raw at the same time - and one helluvalot sexy. She smiled and winked at him, then turned around and walked out with another woman with blue hair - he hadn't even noticed her so far - who giggled and waved to Eilerson, who was manacled to the wall to his right and looked at him, raised eyebrows, with a sarcastic grin on his face.

Suddenly Matheson started and stared at the women's backs. [*Wait... she said something about welcoming our friends... Matthew! He must be coming for us...*] Without thinking, he concentrated on the redhead to scan her, to find out what they were up to before they were out of reach. At the same moment, she stood stock-still, grabbing her companion's arm, and he was surprised to find himself blocked before getting the slightest glimpse into her mind. When he tried to scan the blue-haired woman, it was the same.

The redhead had turned around and stared at him excitedly. "Ilas -- he's a..."

The other woman eyed him with her lavender eyes. "Are you sure?" she asked, her voice expressing the mixture of excitement and doubt she was feeling. Redhead looked at her for a few seconds, threw Matheson a quick sideways glance and smiled pleadingly at Ilas, who shrugged. "We'll see... after we've welcomed their friends and discussed this with our sisters."

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