

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

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Dr. Luke Raven by Lilith

Chapter 3

Gideon emerged from the shuttle behind the security force that had already taken up positions outside. They were followed by Dureena and Luke, who almost fell over Gideon. He had come to a dead stop at the bottom of the ramp. He was scanning the terrain in front of him before he turned to the Sensor officer

"Anything?" he asked tensely.

The Sensor officer shifted nervously as he glanced from his Captain to the reading on his instrument.

"Sorry, sir, but I'm not picking up any signs of Lt. Matheson or Mr. Eilerson." Gideon barely managed to keep himself from swearing at the officer.

"Well what are you getting, Roberts?" Roberts suddenly had the urge to run at the tone in Gideon's voice.

"The same as we picked up on ship's sensors... basic life forms and a small cluster of humanoid life forms... in that direction." Roberts raised the sensor to indicate the area to the north of them.

Gideon moved past Roberts, unaware that Dureena and Raven were watching him with concern. For what seemed like hours he stared off into the distance. The Sensor officer, as well as Dureena and Raven, almost jumped out of their skins when he swung back around and spoke.

"Is there any sign of their shuttle?" Before Roberts could even reply Gideon answered for him "None, right?" The Sensor officer nodded.

Gideon drew in a deep breath and then walked to where Dureena and Raven stood. "I want you and Dureena to stay here with a couple of men, while I go and see what the hell is going on here." Before either could say anything, he turned and ordered the unit's Commander to leave two men while the rest went with him. He then turned back to Dureena.

"If we're not back in 24 hours... I want you to notify Excalibur and get two more units down here to come look for us." Gideon's tone was harsh and brooked no argument from Dureena, who was wishing she could insist that she go with him. Instead she nodded. "Good." Was all Gideon said and with that he turned sharply on his heel and headed off northwards at a pace that left the others scrambling to follow.

Dureena turned to Luke, but neither of them said a word. Their expressions conveyed their concern as they watched Gideon disappear through a small patch of trees.

The four women stood on the battlements of the castle, looking down to the plain below. The shuttles were clearly visible, as were the dozen or so people scrambling quickly in their direction. One man strode out in front; the rest seemed to be trying to stay with him. Four people stayed with the shuttles.

"Are you sure they can't see us, Ilas?" The tall blonde spoke.

The petite blue haired girl looked up from the instrument she was holding. "I don't think so. What are they feeling, Demon?"

The tall blonde closed her eyes. "Concern. Fear. Excitement. All except the one in front. All I get from him is anger. He really is very angry indeed". Her dry clipped tones made the others laugh. Demon knew there was nothing to laugh about. These strangers could be dangerous.

"We're going to have to link to make this work." The black-haired woman spoke for the first time.

She looked around at the others.

"Lily will have to keep the block on that sender. Ias needs to keep focusing on the illusion we've created. Demon, you'll need to keep them calm, and I'll hold them until the guards can disarm them." She needed to verbalize her thoughts to make sure they made sense. Usually she didn't bother, but would send her thoughts directly to the others. Pleased with her plan, she turned. "Do you think that will work?"

The redhead nodded. "Yes, I can keep blocking him, Angel. He's still trying to break through, you know. Naughty boy. I'll have to teach him some manners later." She grinned at her 'sisters' who smiled indulgently at the tiny girl. They knew that the sender wouldn't forget that lesson in a hurry, but he might enjoy learning it.

"Well, don't be too hard on him, Lilith, you might want to save something for later." The tall blonde, Demon, turned and called to the Brakiri guards gathered in the courtyard below. While the women could send messages to each other, they needed to talk aloud to others.

"Form a three sided square around the gate. A trap for them to walk into. We'll tell you when to disarm them." She turned to the raven-haired Angel and spoke again.

"Why don't you open the gates before they run into them, Angel?"

Angel laughed and focused her attention on the large gate at the end of the courtyard. It swung open, apparently on its own. The four women looked down on the approaching party. This might just be fun after all.

Gideon was out of control. He knew it and he could tell that his people knew it. But he couldn't stop himself. His pent up anger was bursting out now that it had a target to focus on. Those bastard Technomages were messing with his instruments, and given half a chance they'd start messing with his head. He'd seen the mindgames Galen could play. Well, enough. He thrashed through the heavy foliage, leading from the front as usual. The others struggled to keep up. Where was this settlement that the sensors picked up? They should be there by now, surely. He stopped abruptly and turned to Roberts.

"Well? Where is it?"

"I don't understand, Captain. According to these readings it's right here. In fact, according to my instruments, we're right in the middle of a group of humanoid life-forms"

Gideon started and looked around. Nothing; just trees and bushes. What the hell was going on here?

He took a step forward and the greenery around him rippled. It was the weirdest sight. It flowed away from him like a viscous liquid. He shook his head, closed his eyes then opened them again. The trees had gone. And the bushes, too. In their place were high walls, and about 50 tough looking Brakiri. And just to make it more interesting, he couldn't move a muscle. So why wasn't

he worried?

The little blue-haired girl looked up from her instrument and giggled.

"Screen is down now. They can see us. Well, they could if Angel let them move their heads." Demon smiled down at the lavender-eyed beauty.

"Thanks, Ilas, that was a really great job." She looked back at the group surrounded by the Brakiri and concentrated on projecting calm and tranquility. The key was to keep them under control until they could disarm them. She glanced at Angel standing alongside her. "Are you OK?"

Angel bit her lip. This was tough. There were 16 people to control, to lock rigidly into position and make them unable to move. That was a huge effort and it was getting to her. Sweat broke out along her forehead.

"Please, move the guards in. NOW!"

Demon signaled to the guards below. They moved in on Gideon's security force and expertly disarmed them and removed their wrist communicators. Three Brakiri stayed with each prisoner. One held each arm and the third held a knife to the prisoner's throat. The remaining Brakiri left the courtyard, taking all the weapons with them.

Gideon couldn't believe what was happening. He'd lost his entire force within seconds of finding the enemy. What sort of leader did that make him? He knew he should feel shame and anger at what had happened, but he didn't feel anything. Just this strange sensation of calm and tranquility. He knew he ought to care what had just happened, but it seemed too much effort. He saw the leader of the Brakiri glance up and tried to see where he was looking. If he strained really hard he could move the muscles in his neck just enough.

Four women stood looking down at him. Women? And they didn't look like any image of a Technomage that he had ever seen. What was going on here?

He studied his captors. Starting with the tallest, an ice maiden of a blonde all dressed in figure-hugging black. It was quite a figure, but that one looked as if she could give frostbite if you tried to touch her. Her face was utterly blank, not a sign of emotion.

Next came a total contrast. A raven-haired stunner all dressed in red. If the first woman was ice, this one was fire. She reminded him of Dureena; her clothes fitted her slim figure in the same way.

The next tallest was... strange. Blue hair? White skin? Dressed in sapphire blue satin and tight black pants that left little to the imagination.

And finally a tiny but perfectly formed pocket Venus. Flaming red hair curled to her waist, while her bodice was cut low in the front showing everything a red-blooded man could want to see. Well,

nearly everything.

If he could just ditch the Brakiri who held him fast and had the knife at his throat, this could be a nice place for a vacation.

The tall blonde stepped forward. Suddenly the calm, which had held his mind a moment before, disappeared and he found he could move again. And he was angry.

"Which one of you is the leader?" Gideon's throat relaxed enough for him to speak.

"I am. Captain Matthew Gideon, Earth Alliance Ship Excalibur"

"Captain, we can play nice or we can play rough, whichever you prefer." He didn't know what he'd expected, but it wasn't that deep sultry voice. His head jerked upwards to look at her, and he felt the prick of the knife at his neck.

"Be careful, the knives are sharp." She sounded amused.

"So what do you want, and what have you done with the two men we sent down earlier?" Gideon spat out his questions, his anger building further. If these women had hurt his men... suddenly the calm descended again.

"Calm down, Captain, no one has been hurt... yet. What we want is your co-operation. We will escort you to a secure area, and then we can talk. If your people resist, they'll be hurt. I'd rather that didn't happen. If you will order them not to resist, it will go easier on them."

Gideon considered. He was suddenly able to look at his situation in a cool rational way. What she said made sense.

"Agreed." He raised his voice to his security force. "Don't resist. As long as they don't harm you, go with them. But if they even try to hurt any of you, do your best to kill the bastards."

He glared up at the tall blonde defiantly. The sense of calm disappeared again and his anger started to rebuild. She didn't even flicker an eyelid, just nodded at her guards, who started to leave the courtyard taking their prisoners with them. The black-haired stunner in red stepped forward alongside her taller companion.

"Not the Captain. I want him, Demon"

The guards holding his arms froze in their tracks, and he felt his muscles go rigid. Dammit he couldn't move again. What was going on here? Something was holding him still. Was it a device of some kind they used? Or some form of mental powers? He suspected the latter, as he could see no instruments other than the small box the blue-haired beauty held in her hand. And were those same powers responsible for the sudden calm that kept descending on him?

Black hair turned to the blonde. Demon? What sort of name was that?

"Ilas wants the big one and Lilith has the sender. I want this one. He's cute"

Cute? That worried him. What exactly had she got planned for him? He could only assume that Blue and the redhead were Ilas and Lilith. But which was which? Did it matter at this point? Hmm, the big one and the sender. Would that be Max and John?

Demon looked down at her sister. "Are you sure? He's not your usual type, Angel." Her face was still a mask.

Angel. Now he had a name for Black. So, Demon, Angel, Ilas and Lilith. Interesting line-up.

"How would you know?" Angel flung the words back. "We haven't seen a human male in God knows how many years. I don't even know what my usual type is any more. But this one will fit the bill nicely until I see something I fancy more."

"Very well, take him, but don't play too rough, you know you can get carried away."

This sounded interesting, if somewhat worrying. What did this Angel have in mind? Mind you, when he watched her moving down the steps towards him he couldn't help but admire the sinuous sway of her hips and the way her high, firm breasts moved under her revealing tunic. Quite a neat package.

As she drew closer he could see her face in more detail; it took his breath away. She had the most piercing blue eyes he had ever seen. Her skin was pale and just a few freckles stood out across her nose and cheeks. Her long, straight black hair swung across her back as she walked towards him. He still couldn't move. She swayed right up to him, pressing against him with her lithe body.

"Come along, Captain, we've got games to play."

Demon watched Angel towing Gideon out of the courtyard. His walk was stiff-legged while she had him under her control. Should she intervene? No, not while they still had enemy forces to cope with. She turned to the other two women who were also watching Angel with some amusement.

The thoughts passed easily between them now they were alone.

[[I need to make sure that those soldiers have been properly secured. Can you handle the four left at the shuttle?]]

Ilas giggled. *[[You're just trying to keep us away from our new pets!]]*

[[I wouldn't dream of it.]] **Demon smiled at the little blue haired girl.** *[[I know you won't hurt them ... well not too much. It's Angel I worry about. She can get a little over enthusiastic at times.]]*

Lilith nodded. *[[Never mind Demon. It's not your fault, and yes, of course we'll deal with the others. Just leave it to us.]]*

Two heads, one red and one blue, close together, plotted as they left the courtyard.

Demon sighed and left to take care of the prisoners.

Ilas and Lilith collected a dozen Brakiri guards on their way out of the castle. Ilas took her screening instrument with them, and they made their way down to the shuttles. The illusion was still perfect from where Dureena and Raven stood, watching anxiously for any sign of their Captain through the dense shrubbery that apparently surrounded them.

Dureena leapt up from the rock where she had been sitting.

"That's it. I've had enough waiting, I'm going after them" Raven grabbed her arm from where he sat and held tight.

"You heard the Captain's orders. They've only been gone an hour or so. There's no need to start panicking yet. Whatever is stopping the Sensors from taking proper readings is blanketing communications too. We won't hear from them until they get back here."

His deep voice spoke reasonably and quietly. Dureena stared down into his dark brown eyes and was comforted by the warmth she could see there. He straightened up and pushed back a lock of soft, dark blond hair that had fallen into his eyes.

He stood abruptly. He was tall and slender, almost thin. His dark eyes sat above high prominent cheekbones. His nose was long, with a bump in the middle, which stopped him being pretty and made his face masculine and handsome instead.

He walked over to one of the crew Gideon had left with him. The woman had her commlink to her ear and was listening intently.

"Anything?" The woman shook her head

He turned back to Dureena and as he did so the scenery rippled. He'd never seen anything quite like it. He was wondering whether he should get his eyes checked out when the rippling effect stopped and the surroundings faded into something quite different from what had been there a moment before. Instead of lush green foliage, he was now looking at a rocky landscape. And above Dureena's head, on a distant hill, he could see the outline of a large castle.

He was about to tell Dureena to turn around and look when he glanced down and saw that her attention was focused behind him. He spun around to see a large number of Brakiri in uniforms, led by the biggest Narn he had ever seen. Incongruously, this strange party was accompanied by a tiny delicate-featured woman, with a mass of curling red hair. He couldn't take his eyes off her, at least until the Narn's clawed hand clamped around his throat, which dragged his attention away.

The Narn lifted him into the air and growled at Dureena and the two crewmen who had rushed

towards him "Move any closer and I'll break his neck," it said, then giggled! He'd never heard a Narn giggle before; it was a seriously strange noise.

Dureena and the Crewmen stopped dead in their tracks, watching as Raven hung in mid-air, suspended from the Narn's large hand.

The little red head stepped forward.

"We are now going to disarm you, tie you up and take you back to our castle." Her voice was like a cat's purr, soft and throaty. The Brakiri surrounded them and began restraining them. The Narn lowered the doctor to the ground and stepped back. Again, there was a rippling effect and the Narn faded from existence. Instead a blue-haired, lavender-eyed exotic stood in front of him. Fascinating! He'd heard of shape shifters before but had never seen one.

Demon was waiting for them when they got back to the castle. She watched the group crossing the courtyard and called down for them to stop. She had sensed something from the woman dressed in brown leather that disturbed her -- a sense of quiet satisfaction that a prisoner should not be feeling.

She descended the stairs from the battlements and crossed to where the woman stood, held by two Brakiri with her wrists bound behind her.

"Did you search her for weapons?" She asked the Brakiri guards. They nodded. "I somehow don't think you got everything." She turned to the woman and stepped close, well within her personal space. "Did they?"

Demon knew how to use her size to intimidate when she needed to. She was half a foot taller than this woman, and probably weighed half as much again. But the woman just looked up at her with cool yellow eyes, showing and feeling no fear. Why was that?

Demon leant down to whisper in the woman's ear. "Remove all remaining weapons or I'll have them strip search you here in the courtyard." Dureena flinched. She moved her wrists and the bindings dropped away. Demon stepped back and watched, impressed, as the woman removed at least a dozen knives from places the guards had never even thought to look.

Dureena looked up at the tall blonde. "That's everything."

Demon could feel that she was lying. She turned to the guards "Strip her," she said, then turned back to Dureena. "And when they've finished we'll have the good doctor here conduct a full internal examination to make sure there's nothing else to find."

Dureena's eyes widened at the threat. She knew this bitch wasn't bluffing, that she would do exactly what she promised if she didn't get full and instant co-operation. Demon felt Dureena's fear and hated herself for provoking it. But she had to defend her sisters.

Dureena removed her last holdout knife and the garroting cord she kept at her waist. "That really

is everything." Her voice sounded defeated, and Demon could feel her sense of loss without her weapons. This time she was telling the truth. She turned to the guards.

"Put them with the others."

Ilas and Lilith had watched the whole episode in silence. This was why they relied on Demon. She knew what people felt and kept them safe. Ilas smiled happily up at her.

"Can I go now? I have a new toy and I want to play!"

"There's just one last thing Ilas. Their ship will be concerned if they don't hear from them. So we'd better make sure they hear something. Could you impersonate them, do you think?" Ilas bounced around Demon, laughing and clapping her hands at the idea.

"Oh yes, Demon, you know how much I like to play pretend! Can I be the Captain first? Can I? Please?"

"Of course you can darling, whatever you want. Just call them every few hours and tell them that there's no news yet, but that you're still trying to track down the inhabitants." Ilas nodded and trotted off in the direction of her rooms.

Lilith had been watching the retreating guards and in particular the back of the doctor.

"Wait a minute!" The guards stopped and awaited instructions. Lilith hurried over to the doctor and touched his arm "You can come with me. My name is Lilith but you can call me Lily if you like"

Raven looked down at the tiny redhead and was utterly captivated. She was beautiful with green eyes and pale skin. Her shapely figure showed through her exotic clothes. Lilith gave him a smile that seemed to be half promise, half threat - Luke couldn't stand her eyes any longer and had to lower his gaze to the ground, though it was hard to do so. [*Her eyes... I could fall into them and drown there!*]

The guards let him go, and he didn't resist as she led him away to a room high up in the castle. But every time her eyes rested on him, he felt a shiver go up and down his spine -- as if her look was something physical stroking his skin. She pushed him through the door then stood in the doorway chewing her lip. "Which one first?" she mused. He didn't have a clue what she was talking about. She made a decision and smiled cheerily at him "Oh well, first come first served. See you later Doctor," she said and shut the door behind him. He heard the lock click into place and wondered what he should do next.

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