

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn - Part 1: Past

by The Space Witches

{Prologue} {Chapter 1} {Chapter 2}



Demon in front of the waterfall on Eriadne

Chapter 1

Gideon was sitting at the desk in his quarters, going over reports, when the door buzzer sounded.

"Open." He spoke around the pen clenched between his teeth and continued reading as the door opened and someone entered. After a few moments, he lifted his head and turned in his chair to see who had come through the door but hadn't spoken or moved into the room. He was surprised to see John Matheson standing in the doorway, just far enough inside so that the door had closed behind him. The XO was staring straight ahead, his mouth slightly open, his eyes wide and staring. His face had turned a deep shade of pink.

Turning to follow Matheson's gaze, Gideon looked at the large viewscreen on his cabin wall. [Shit!]. He dropped the pen from his mouth and lunged for a control on his desk, speaking hurriedly as he did so, "I'm sorry, John. I'd forgotten that was up there." He hit the control that blanked the screen.

Matheson turned towards him, eyes still slightly glazed, and swallowed hard. "Did you..." His voice cracked and he started again. "Did you take that picture, Captain?"

Gideon laughed. "If I didn't, then someone's in deep shit. I wouldn't want anyone else getting that familiar with Deborah. I'm sorry if I embarrassed you, John. I have some of the pictures I took of Deborah during our last visit loaded as wallpaper for the view screen. The system randomly selects one to display and changes every hour or so. That one was...well, it happens to be one of my favorites, so the system is weighted in its favor."

Matheson smiled. "Well, I can see why it's a favorite. It's very beautiful. *She's* very beautiful. It's a great picture. Would you mind?" He gestured at the viewscreen.

Gideon grinned and hit the button that brought the picture back onto the screen. "If you ever tell Deborah that you've seen this, I'll be singing soprano for the rest of my life."

The two men looked at the picture on the screen. Deborah was naked, turned three-quarters away from the camera, standing near the waterfall by the side of the pool on Eriadne. Her arms were held by her side, and she looked back over her shoulder at the viewer. The outline of her left breast was visible in profile, while the main view was of her back and her rounded buttocks. Her long, golden blonde hair cascaded down her back almost to her waist.

Matheson sighed. "She really is stunning, isn't she? From that angle, you'd never guess that she was pregnant. I never realized just how beautiful Demon is; I guess I only have eyes for Lily when we're planet-side. I wish I had a picture of Lily looking like that. Well, I wish I had *any* picture of Lily." His voice was wistful.

Gideon looked dismayed. "God, I'm sorry John. It never occurred to me. Hang on a minute." He started to root around in a drawer. He pulled out a number of data crystals and examined each in turn, grunting in satisfaction when he found the one he wanted. Getting up from his desk, he strode to the screen, and inserted the crystal into the appropriate slot. The screen changed to a different picture.

Gideon gestured at it. "Remember the day when we all went for a picnic by the lake? I took a whole load of pictures that day. Some are bound to have Lily in them." The first picture on the screen was another study of Deborah, lying on her side, reading a book. In this picture, her swollen belly was more evident, even through the black sundress she was wearing. Gideon hit the control to move the view forward. Picture after picture of Deborah filled the screen.

Gideon grinned sheepishly at Matheson. "OK, I got a bit carried away. Hang on a minute, I'm sure I've got some group shots here." Finally, a picture that showed people other than Deborah was displayed. The first was of Deborah kneeling on the ground, offering a full glass to Raven, who stood by her. Then came the picture Gideon thought he'd remembered. As it appeared, he heard Matheson draw in his breath sharply and he turned to look at the young Lieutenant.

Matheson's face was filled with longing as he looked at the image on the screen. In it, Deborah and Lily faced each other, both kneeling, heads down, looking at something that Deborah was holding cupped in her hands. The wind had caught their dresses, pressing the material back against their bodies, clearly showing their pregnancies. They were both in profile, both with hair streaming down

their backs, but the contrast of their size and coloring was striking.

Gideon dragged his eyes away from Deborah to look at Lily, and he smiled. He had to admit that she was a beautiful girl and the picture was a good one. It showed her red hair and pale skin to perfection, and her delicate features were stunning in profile. He picked up a blank crystal and inserted it into the copy slot, hit a control, and instantly copied the contents of his crystal onto the blank. He turned and offered the copy to Matheson. "This one contains all the pictures of the picnic. There should be more shots of Lily on here, so if you can put up with wading through all the shots of Deborah, I'm sure you'll find a few there that you can enjoy. I'm just sorry I didn't think of this before."

Matheson took the copy from him and grasped it tightly in his fist. He looked as if he expected someone to come along and wrestle it away from him. Gideon pitied the man who would try.

Matheson's voice was gruff with emotion as he thanked Gideon, then he smiled again as he looked at the picture on the screen, which had reverted to the waterfall scene. "You know the other reason I never really looked at Demon?" Gideon shook his head, watching his first officer as he looked at the screen and spoke again. "Because she frightens me half to death!"

Gideon roared with laughter. "Why? She's a pussycat! OK, she's still got claws and she knows how to use them, but the only person she likes to sharpen them on is me. What do you have to be scared of?"

Matheson shook his head and grinned. "I don't know, really. I think it's that aloof ice-queen act, and the fact that she's taller than me and outweighs me by several kilos. Sometimes I'd catch her looking at me and Lily, and I'd just know that if I ever did anything to hurt Lily, Demon would break me into little pieces and feed me to the dogs!"

Gideon smiled and nodded. "She probably would. You'd better be nice to her little sister. Deborah has a strong protective streak where her sisters are concerned." He stopped smiling as he remembered the sister she'd lost and the pain that loss had caused the three remaining sisters--Deborah in particular.

Matheson spoke quickly. "On the subject of which, I've just had the latest Ranger report on the search for Lucas and Angel. That's why I came to see you."

Gideon moved back to the chair behind his desk and gestured for Matheson to sit opposite. They moved easily back into Captain/First Officer mode. Gideon asked for a report.

Matheson took a deep breath and prepared for the storm. "Still nothing." He watched as Gideon frowned and he hurried on, "They've now investigated every Earth Alliance planet and most of those belonging to the Interstellar Alliance, too. No trace. That leaves the Centauri Republic, which is pretty much off limits, but it's unlikely that they could have gotten there, anyway."

Gideon surged up from his desk and started to pace. "Damn it, John! They must be somewhere! It's been over three months since they left Eriadne. They can't have just disappeared. I'm going to track that girl down and put her in front of a court if it kills me. I promised Dureena that I'd go after whomever was responsible for the death of her baby, and I mean to deliver on that promise."

Matheson watched with concern, then spoke quietly. " 'That girl'? What about Lucas? Why are you so determined to bring Angel to justice?" He'd wondered about this before. Why was Gideon so angry

with Angel--to the point where he seemed to forget that Lucas was the instigator of what had happened? He watched as Gideon stopped in his tracks and turned to face him.

Gideon protested. "Of course I want to catch Lucas as well. The pair of them were in it together, and I want to see them both brought to justice. For God's sake, they killed a child!"

Matheson spoke softly again. "I know that, Captain, but Demon and Lily told us over and over that Angel couldn't have known what she and Lucas were doing, that she places a high value on life and would never have anything to do with such a sacrifice. They both believe strongly that Lucas misled her. Why do you find that so hard to believe?" He knew that he was taking a risk. Gideon wasn't entirely reasonable on the subject of Angel but Matheson was interested in knowing why.

Gideon struggled to keep his temper. He wanted to lash out and tell Matheson to mind his own damned business, but knew that in doing so, he'd make his unreasonable attitude on the subject of Angel even more apparent.

He found it hard to answer Matheson's question. Why couldn't he believe what Deborah had told him about her sister? Who else would know her better? Deep down, he knew that his determination to find and punish Angel was driven by his own guilt. Gideon found it hard to admit to himself, and impossible to reveal to anyone else, that he was convinced that he had driven Angel to do what she'd done.

If only he hadn't half-raped her in the library, then made love to her in the orchard. If only he hadn't verbally assaulted her at dinner, then pursued her and physically assaulted her when she'd retaliated. If he'd just stayed well away from Angel, as he'd promised Galen, maybe things would have been different--maybe she wouldn't have felt so lost and lonely that she was driven to bring back her abusive lover, just so she could feel loved and wanted.

Gideon had so many regrets about the way he'd handled Angel that he hardly knew where to start, and if anyone found out about the things he'd done, he would probably lose Deborah as well. How could she tolerate a man who'd abused her sister so badly?

He'd spent many nights alone in his quarters, trying to think this through, trying to understand his need to punish Angel. Yes, it was rooted in the way she'd treated him when they had first arrived on Eriadne. She'd used her telekinetic powers to control and dominate him and some part of him resented it, but a part of him had enjoyed what she'd done and was strongly attracted to her. What she'd then done, albeit accidentally, in driving him out of his own body and letting someone else take over; that felt like a violation he couldn't get past.

Gideon knew that if he could find and punish Angel, if he could put her in front of an independent court, and they found her guilty, then he could feel vindicated. Somehow, that would make his actions less reprehensible. If she were found guilty of killing a child, that would make *her* evil and he wouldn't have to bear the responsibility.

Arriving at this conclusion had raised Gideon's feelings of self-contempt to a new high. He wanted Angel to be proven guilty so he could feel good about himself. As he paced the floor of his quarters, he knew that Matheson was expecting an answer, and he couldn't think of a thing to say which wouldn't fill them both with disgust and contempt for the illustrious Captain.

Matheson watched with concern as Gideon paced silently, not answering the question he'd been asked, obviously in acute discomfort over the subject. Matheson wondered again why Gideon became so agitated when the subject of Angel arose. He knew that Angel had mistreated Gideon when they first visited Eriadne, but it seemed unlikely that he still bore a grudge over that. Gideon could nurse grudges with the best, but he wasn't normally vindictive. Yet something about Angel brought that out in him.

Finally, Gideon stopped pacing and looked at his Lieutenant. "You're right. I should try to believe what Deborah and Lily have told us. Angel was probably just a tool Lucas used to get what he wanted. She could be as much of a victim as Dureena. I'll keep working at it, John, but keep reminding me, will you? I do seem to have a problem being fair to that girl."

Matheson could see the effort this admission cost Gideon and decided to leave it at that for the moment, but he had every intention of taking Gideon up on his instruction. Any time he felt that his Captain was being unfair to Angel, he would be sure to point it out.

Galen sat at the controls to his ship, brooding. He didn't need to sit here to operate the ship; he could do that from anywhere, but he found himself spending more and more time in this room, thinking about the past and wondering what to do about the future. He thought back to the time when he'd returned to the Excalibur, having dropped Lucas and Angel at Babylon 5. The memory of his last sight of Angel still caused him pain. She'd rejected him utterly, and even when given the opportunity to rejoin her sisters, it wasn't enough to convince her to go with him. She was hopelessly, inexplicably bound to Lucas. He would never forget her last words: "Go to hell, Galen. I'd rather die than go anywhere with you." Then he'd watched as Lucas put his hands around her neck and threatened her life if Galen revealed where he'd left them.

That was the main cause of his breach with Matthew and the Excalibur. Galen thought that if he'd been willing to tell Matthew where he'd taken Lucas and Angel, Matthew might have forgiven him the betrayal and allowed him to rejoin the Excalibur, but of course, he couldn't do that.

Galen had returned to Excalibur a week after they'd left Eriadne. In hindsight, he realized that he should have stayed away longer. Matthew had still been in a foul temper after having to leave Demon; he'd been in no mood to listen to Galen. It hadn't seemed that way when Galen first contacted the Excalibur and had asked for permission to dock. Matthew had stared at him through the bridge viewscreen, his face an expressionless mask as he spoke abruptly. "Permission granted." Then the screen had gone blank.

Galen sat unmoving, remembering what had happened next.

Galen walked through the corridors of the Excalibur, aware that the crew was staring at him, but that was nothing new. Arriving in the conference room, he found Matthew, Matheson, and Eilerson waiting for him. Max and John were seated, but Matthew stood, leaning one shoulder against the wall, his feet crossed at the ankles, his arms crossed in front of him. The stance was misleadingly casual. Galen could see the tension in his arms and face that portrayed Matthew's fury. He stood in the doorway waiting for the storm to break, but it didn't.

Matthew's voice was quiet and controlled as he spoke. "Well, Galen? Do you have anything to tell us?" The aloofness in his voice and eyes chilled Galen; he'd never seen Matthew look that cold, but Galen knew Matthew was a passionate man. For him to be so controlled was daunting.

Galen looked to Matheson and Eilerson, hoping to see something more positive from either, some sign of belief that he could have had a reason for his actions, but Matheson looked as coldly furious as Matthew did. Max looked as if he wanted to throw Galen out of an airlock. Galen only then remembered that Max had been one of the fathers of Dureena's unborn child.

Galen took a deep breath and tried to explain that he'd had no choice but to give assistance to Lucas in his escape, but he was unable to tell them why. He couldn't betray his order and give away the secret that he'd kept, even though his betrayal of his friends had cost them dear. It quickly became obvious that they were unwilling to accept his unsupported statement.

Matthew's only comment cut Galen to the core. "Maybe you'd like to go back to Eriadne and explain to Dureena why you helped the killers of her child. If she'll accept what you've just told us, come back and let us know. Then maybe we'll talk again."

Matthew, of course, knew Galen couldn't do that. He knew that Dureena, of all people, would never accept the pathetic excuse of an explanation. Galen started to turn toward the door to leave when Matthew's fury finally burst out of him.

"Is that it, Galen? Is that all you can say? You had no choice? You son of a bitch, do you know what you did?" Matthew went on to explain in detail the effect that Lucas cutting the link to Angel had had on the women, on all of them, not just Demon. Now Galen realized why Matheson was there, and why he was as angry as Matthew. Although he'd seen Angel's reaction to the loss of the link, he'd not realized the impact it had had on the others.

Max suddenly leaped to his feet, turning on Galen with a fury that none of them had seen before. "Gideon said to go and ask Dureena what she thinks. Well, maybe you'd better steer clear of that planet for a while. I swear that if Dureena gets a hold of you now, she'll tear you apart, and your Technomage powers won't help a damn--and Ilas, Demon, and Lily will help her do it." He stood with his face centimeters from Galen's, invading his personal space. "On second thought, Galen, why don't you go back there? Maybe your death might make up in some small part for the pain you helped inflict." He spat the words into Galen's face.

Galen drew himself up and almost retaliated. He raised his hand, ready to let loose a fireball. Max just stared him down, almost defying him to do his worst, to prove himself the enemy of them all. Galen lowered his hand again and spoke quietly.

"I can see it's pointless trying to convince you that I had no choice, and I understand why you can't believe me when I say I can't tell you why. I'll go for now, but if you need me, you can call."

He turned to leave, but he was stopped by Matthew's voice. "Where did you take them, Galen? Where should we look for the killers?" Galen had been dreading that question since he'd arrived, knowing that his answer would be the final destruction of his friendship with the people on the Excalibur.

He turned back to face Matthew and spoke quietly. "I can't tell you that, Matthew. Believe me, I wish I could, but if I do, Lucas will kill Angel. You may not care about that, but I can't allow it to happen."

He watched as Matthew's eyes closed and he shook his head. "Get out, Galen. Just leave, and don't

come back until you decide to help us."

Galen had taken him at his word. He raised his eyes back to the image in front of him. The red aura of hyperspace shone out at him, marred by a blue mark that indicated the presence of the Excalibur. He was getting close enough for contact now.

That last remark had hurt the most. He'd wanted to help them but couldn't. He could never explain the hold Lucas had over him, the thing that had forced him to help the monster he both despised and detested. But now he had information that Matthew needed. Somehow Galen had to get him to listen.

Gideon sat watching as Galen walked into the conference room, waiting to hear if Galen was prepared to give him any more information about where he'd taken Lucas and Angel. Gideon had almost given up hope of finding this information from any other source, but he didn't plan on letting Galen know that. He also had another reason for agreeing to see the Technomage, but that would emerge during their discussions. He saw Galen pause inside the doorway, then move to take an empty seat across the table from where Gideon sat.

Gideon raised an eyebrow. "What can we do for you, Galen?" His tone was deceptively mild.

Galen kept his voice equally neutral. "I have some information that I think will be of interest to you, Matthew."

Gideon gestured for him to continue. He watched Galen summon his thoughts and start.

"When I was here last, I couldn't tell you where I had taken Lucas and Angel. If I had, Angel's life would have been at risk, but now rumors are spreading, different sources of information are appearing. This fact is no longer held by me alone and I can therefore share it with you, without risk to Angel's life. I took Lucas and Angel to Babylon 5. I have reason to believe that they have remained there ever since."

Gideon leaned forward and spoke. "And how did they get aboard, Galen? Did you help them with that, too? Maybe you provided them with identity papers?"

Galen shook his head. "I believe you should speak to your old friend, Captain Lochley, about that. It would appear that Lucas pretended to be you, and Lochley allowed him and Angel to enter without logging them onto the Security net."

Gideon leaped to his feet and started pacing. "Damn! It's bad enough knowing that he's out there living free, but knowing that he can impersonate me, that he has all the knowledge I had, is infuriating! How in the hell do we stop him?" He paused for consideration, then carried on talking, more to himself than to Galen. "Maybe if I call Lochley and explain what's happened, she could send in a security team to pick him up."

Galen shook his head again. "Babylon 5 is too big. There are too many places for people to hide, especially Downbelow. It would take an army to search and find them, and Lochley doesn't have an army. Besides, if my informant is correct, Lucas will be leaving Babylon 5 soon."

Gideon stopped in his tracks to look at Galen closely. "Leaving? To go where? And how do you know this? We've had the Rangers trying to trace Buck for months now."

A tight smile appeared on Galen's face. "Technomages have resources that even the Rangers cannot match, Matthew. Are you sure you wish to continue to deprive this ship of the benefit of those resources? As to where Lucas is going, I don't have that information. I know he's been looking to buy a ship and hire a skilled pilot. Lucas has built a small empire for himself in Brown Sector on B5. He's a rich and powerful man there now—a law unto himself and the people around him."

Gideon grimaced. "I'll come back to your 'resources' later, Galen. For the moment, how do we find out where Buck is planning to go? And how do we do so in time to be there waiting for him?"

Galen spoke quietly. "My informants will do their best to keep me advised. I will pass that information to you as soon as I have it."

Gideon snorted his contempt for this statement. "So you're asking me to trust you again, Galen? Give me one good reason why I should, given your past history." He waited for a response to his deliberate baiting, not surprised when Galen showed signs of irritation.

"Matthew, I didn't have to bring this information to you. I have done so as a gesture of good faith. I know that in your view I have acted irresponsibly in this matter, but you should consider your own actions before you judge mine. How much did you contribute to this situation?"

Gideon quickly suppressed the wave of guilt that swept over him in response to Galen's words, then leaned forward on the table, putting his face so close that he could feel Galen's breath. "I live with the consequences of my actions every day. Galen, you'd better learn to do the same." He straightened and walked back to his seat, settling himself in his chair before speaking again. "What do you want, Galen? You didn't bring me this information out of the goodness of your heart."

Galen leaned forward across the table, his voice deep and intense. "You need me, Matthew. You need the skills I can bring to the search for the cure. I understand your feelings of betrayal at what I did. I would feel the same in your place, but I can contribute to the mission and I want to do so." He leaned back and looked down his long nose at Gideon. "But if you keep on behaving like a spoiled brat, I might just change my mind."

Gideon bit down on a retort that compared Galen's mental age to his shoe size, leaned back, and smiled lazily. "You haven't been keeping up with the news, have you, Galen? Haven't you heard? We've found a cure."

Galen's chin dropped in amazement. Gideon couldn't help but feel pleasure at the dumbstruck look on Galen's face. He'd longed to pierce that self-satisfied smugness for years, even when he'd counted Galen as a friend. He savored the silence for a moment before continuing. "But you're right that we need your 'resources', because the cure we've found isn't enough. If you want back in as part of this mission, there's something I want from you. Do you want to hear what the deal is?"

Galen nodded and watched as Gideon stood and walked to the viewscreen on the wall. He pulled a data crystal from his pocket and dropped it into the play slot. The screen came alive with images of riots and destruction. Fires burned and buildings exploded; bodies were strewn in the streets.

Galen spoke. "I've seen this before, Matthew. Earth, soon after the plague was first identified."

Gideon shook his head. "No. Earth now. It's started again, and it's happening because of the cure we found." He went on to explain that one of the devices they'd brought back from their last visit to Eriadne was of Vorlon origin and was capable of stripping pathogens from the bodies of sick people. With very little adaptation, they had found that it could be used to strip all traces of the plague nanoviruses from the bodies of those treated. Then those people were cured.

"But there's a catch. We can cure people, one at a time, but we can't stop them from getting re-infected, so we have to take people, one at a time, isolate them, and strip out the virus first from the isolation unit, then from the patient. Then they can be released, but they can't return to Earth, or they just catch the plague again."

Gideon was pacing again, well aware that his frustration and bitterness were evident to the man watching him. "But how do they take ten billion people and treat them one by one? And then every other air-breathing life form on Earth? How do they evacuate every living thing from a planet, cure them individually, then send them elsewhere? They can't. So they take individuals who are considered 'important'--politicians and their families, scientists, doctors, financiers, businessmen, and generals--and they cure each one of them and send them to other parts of the galaxy. But who makes the choice? Who plays God and chooses who's going to live and who'll be left to die? It didn't take long for the news to spread, and now everyone wants to be one of the few. A lot of people are willing to kill, burn, maim, and do whatever they have to, as long as they get the cure. Hence..."

Gideon waved at the screen and the pictures of disaster shown there. "The irony is that more people are dying from the violence than the plague. That's the great contribution that the Excalibur has made to saving the people of Earth." He returned to his seat at the table and slouched back, aware that he was showing his tiredness and guilt at the appalling situation that now existed and for which he felt responsible.

Galen watched the screen silently for a time, then spoke softly. "What do you want from me, Matthew? How do think I can help with this?" He gestured at the screen.

Gideon spoke quietly, but his voice showed his vehemence. "We needed a better solution. We needed a way to stop people from being re-infected. We needed a vaccine. The screen that you helped Sarah develop from the Technomage virus was a step in the right direction, but we needed to take it further. We needed to make it permanent, not just a forty-eight-hour protection, and by using the data that Max brought back from Eriadne, we've done just that. We now have a permanent viral screen that stops people from becoming infected by the Drakh plague, but there's a catch. We only have a limited supply of the Technomage virus to work with. We went back to that planet and scraped up every milligram of the stuff we could find, but it's a drop in the ocean in comparison to what we need, and you destroyed the machine that could create more of it."

Gideon watched as Galen winced at this accusation. He knew that he was being completely unfair; Galen had destroyed the machine to save their lives. It didn't come as a great surprise when Galen surged to his feet.

"That's enough. I've taken your insults and innuendos until now because I was willing to admit that my behavior had been less than honorable. It seems that you are unable to do the same. I'd once thought we were friends, Matthew. It seems I was wrong. A friend would never make that sort of entirely unwarranted comment. I have helped you far more often than I've hurt you, and I will not tolerate this kind of abuse, especially from someone as fallible as you, Matthew." He leaned forward on the table, bringing his face within centimeters of Gideon's.

"Just how much of this whole mess are you willing to take responsibility for? You were the one dragging that damned Box around with you. If it hadn't been for that, Lucas would never have been let loose. John Matheson wouldn't have nearly lost his life. Angel wouldn't have ended up obsessed by that evil bastard, obsessed enough to bring him back, killing Dureena's child in the process. And yet you blame me for helping him escape because it caused your...where some distress. Heaven forbid that St. Matthew the Righteous should take the blame for anything." He turned and started to walk toward the door.

Gideon leaped to his feet and grabbed Galen's shoulder, pulling him back into the room. "Don't you think I know that? I go over it and over it, trying to think of what I could have done differently to prevent the pain I've caused, but I can't change anything. I can't go back and space that fucking Box, much as I'd like to. I can't change the fact that I virtually raped Angel and drove her into bringing Lucas back. I can't bring Dureena's child back to life, no matter how much I want to. And I can't prevent my 'whore', as you call her--though God alone knows what she's ever done to you to merit that description--from slowly killing herself with grief at the loss of her sister. I can't do a damned thing about any of it. But I can do something about that." He pointed to the viewscreen where the scenes of violence continued to run silently. He took a deep breath and brought himself back under control, speaking more softly as he continued. "To do that, I need your help. Galen, don't let your anger with me prevent you from helping the people dying every day on Earth."

Galen turned and stared at him, then slowly nodded and returned to his seat. Gideon took another deep breath and continued. "What we now need is the ability to manufacture more of that Technomage virus. We can turn it into a permanent viral screen and then we can continue manufacturing the stripping devices and treat everyone on Earth and every other air-breathing life form we can find." He was working as hard as he knew how to stay focused on the greater issues. If he allowed himself to think about the things Galen had said, he'd...well, he'd deal with that later.

Galen frowned. "You know that my skills in the medical field are limited. I did what I could to help Dr. Chambers develop the original screen, but there's not much more I can contribute."

Gideon nodded. "I know. But you're not the only rogue Technomage. Your friend Alwyn showed some interest in medical matters."

Galen leaned back in his chair and nodded. "Now I understand. You want me to get Alwyn to help you."

Gideon nodded, watching Galen carefully. "That's the deal, Galen." Gideon was desperately hoping that Alwyn's sense of compassion and justice would bring him into the project if Galen made contact with him and told him of their need. He waited as Galen considered.

Galen nodded slowly. "I will contact Alwyn and ask for his assistance." He lifted his head and looked straight into Gideon's eyes. "I cannot guarantee that he will come, but I will try."

Gideon sat alone in the conference room long after Galen had left. He was thinking about what Galen had said, about how he was responsible for the whole mess with Lucas, about all of the consequences that had flowed from it, and he knew Galen was right. It was his fault, all of it. He'd known how dangerous the Apocalypse Box was, he'd been warned by the previous owner, then had watched him die. He should have burned it then, but it had been too useful to him--first in his career, and then in the search for a cure. He'd always been able to find an excuse for why he should keep it, why he should

keep consulting it, until finally, he'd paid the price.

The Captain stood and started to pace. A wave of guilt washed over him as he realized that the price he'd paid had been minor compared to what his stupidity had cost others. He'd had a few days of discomfort as the burns on his chest and hands healed, and some unpleasant moments thinking about someone else using his body. Compared to what others had suffered, that was minor. John had nearly died, and if it hadn't been for the technology they'd found on Eriadne, he'd still be carrying the scars from his wounds.

And Angel, what about her? He'd abused her and was now hunting her down like an animal. If he'd destroyed the Box, as he should have, Angel would never have met Lucas, and she would still be living peacefully with her sisters on Eriadne. Thinking of her sisters brought Gideon to think about Deborah and how she'd looked when he'd seen her. He felt a surge of anger as he remembered Galen calling her his 'whore'. He knew that Galen had chosen the word deliberately, to hurt him. But she didn't deserve that or any of the things that had happened to her; she'd been nothing but kind and good to everyone around her. He loved her and wanted to be with her and their son, but even she was suffering the consequences of his actions. Deborah was fading away in front of him, from grief and loss, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Remembering Deborah as she was during his first visit, Gideon suddenly wondered if she'd ever really wanted to get pregnant. When she found she was pregnant, she said she wanted the child, but would she have chosen to be pregnant? He couldn't even get *that* right by taking the time to practice safe sex. If he'd gotten Angel pregnant, he might be able to claim that it wasn't his fault, that she'd never given him the chance to prevent it. [And what about the library? You certainly weren't thinking about safe sex then, were you Matt?] But Deborah's pregnancy was entirely his responsibility. He'd deliberately seduced her, to gain information and also as a way of controlling her. He'd given no thought to the possible consequences for her.

Worst of all, though, was Dureena. Gideon slumped into a chair and held his head in his hands. He remembered how happy she and Max had been when they'd told him that she was pregnant. Dureena had been ecstatic at the thought that she'd no longer be the last of her race, at the fact that what she'd thought impossible had actually happened. Gideon had watched her and Max grow closer as every day of her pregnancy passed and her belly swelled. He'd even been envious of them having each other when Deborah was so far away from him. Then through his stupidity and brutality, because of the way he'd treated Angel and driven her to bring Lucas back, Dureena had lost everything--her child, her home on the Excalibur, even Max, who couldn't stay behind with her when she wasn't fit to travel. And the only thing Gideon had been able to do to make amends was to promise her that he'd find whomever was responsible and bring them to justice. [Well that's a tough one, Matt. How about looking in the mirror, then arresting yourself?]

Gideon pulled himself upright and straightened his jacket before moving to the door facing the bridge. He knew he couldn't hide out in the conference room all day, wallowing in self-pity, whimpering over what a bad person he was. He pushed all the guilt and self-doubt down deep, where no one could see them, and put on the façade that he wore for the world every day. Gideon the Strong, Gideon the Confident, Gideon the Brave. [And what about Gideon the Rapist, Gideon the Baby Killer? How do you like having him for a Captain?] He pushed the thoughts out of his head as he walked through the map room and onto the bridge.

The Witches of Eriadne: Fire Burn

{[Part 1: Past](#)} {[Part 2: Present](#)} {[Part 3: Present Perfect](#)} {[Part 4: Future](#)} {[Part 5: Conditional](#)}