

# The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four G - Part 1: Room Service

by Mistress Sarah and The Space Witches



Did you ever wonder why Alwyn has golden dragons emblazoned on his ship's wings?

## Chapter 1

August 2269

Sarah Chambers

There was the smell of brimstone in the air, which meant only one thing. There was a Technomage in my lab again. Listening closely, I was glad to hear that there was no sound of alarms or shots being fired. All of those things had a tendency to happen whenever a Technomage showed up. Especially Alwyn.

Who was I kidding? He was the only Technomage who showed up, as Galen had disappeared after whatever had happened between him and Gideon. I didn't know all the details, but I got the feeling that the story I'd heard was distinctly slanted in one direction. Not that I didn't think that Galen had really fucked things up. He'd even managed to piss off John Matheson and that took some doing, but somehow, I was sure there was more finger pointing to be done than just at Galen. After all, who owned the Box originally? Let he who is without blame start throwing the boulders around.

Damn it, that wasn't the sound of a large rock being thrown by an irate Technomage, was it? Alwyn! I was trying to get some work done here. Enough already. I heard the sound of alarms going off, as the guard realized that there was an intruder in the Treatment Center. She must be new as by now everyone else just faints whenever Alwyn shows up. Time to go stop the guard from trying to shoot Alwyn, as the last time that happened, I had to do some fast talking to prevent him punishing the damned guard painfully.

That's me, dependable, reliable, sane, (Thankfully after that brief stint in psychotherapy) and always trying to smooth things over. BORING with a capital B-O-R-I-N-G. I'm tired of being good little Sarah, and the thought that some guard was going to learn some manners from a Technomage was rather amusing. Perhaps I could sneak out and watch Alwyn turn her into a plant or something. I needed a break. I'd been working for sixteen hours straight that day.

No, Sarah. You've got to keep yourself focused. People are still busy dying, and you need to work harder. Just because we found a cure doesn't mean that the work stops. The cure we'd found was a slow cure--too damned slow. People were still dying while they waited for treatment. So good, reliable, dependable, sane Sarah had to keep on looking for something better, something quicker. Sheridan may have pulled the Excalibur off the job, but no one could pull me away from my work. To hell with the possibility of some light entertainment, and to hell with the guard. I was busy, and if they didn't read the memos posted about a certain elderly looking man who had a tendency to walk through walls, then it wasn't Sarah Chambers, MD's fault.

I cranked the microscope up a notch, after rubbing my eyes. I had been staring at the damned thing for hours today, and my eyes were getting tired and watery. There was a loud scream, and then the bells stopped. Thankfully, as I was getting a headache.

"Hello, Sarah." It was a warm, male voice that sounded amused. "I hoped that for once you might be observing something other than your microscope, but apparently, you're not. You know there are prettier things to look at than viruses. Blue sky, green grass, red blood. All such lovely colors."

"Hello, Alwyn. You didn't kill the guard did you?" My tone was tart, and I was annoyed. Alwyn was showing up regularly nowadays, and I had an odd feeling that he was showing up to visit me. He wasn't acting like a suitor, but there was an appraising look in his eyes whenever he looked at me that made me wonder. Alwyn, you're a little too... well... Technomagish for a simple, sweet little girl like me. But he never mentioned it, never acted like a man interested in a woman, and I also found that annoying. What the hell was I? Chopped Spoo? Too low on the food chain for him to be interested? I didn't know if I should be angry or glad.

"No. I didn't. But she learned some manners. She shot at me, Sarah." Alwyn's voice was a study in amused horror as he looked at the hole in his jacket. "It was a good jacket, Sarah. Now, she's gone and put a hole in it."

I looked up from the microscope, and noticed that Alwyn wasn't wearing his usual Technomage outfit. No, instead, he was wearing a rather sharp suit, slightly out of fashion, but one that suited his color and his personality. He looked... respectable. Distinguished, even. If a Technomage with the power to blow up a planet could ever be... well... cute. The average person could easily be fooled into thinking that Alwyn was a dear, sweet fatherly individual who was just a little bit eccentric.

"Hello. Do you think you could fix that for me?" He murmured that.

"I don't do sewing. I suture people, not clothes, and I use glue."

"Not you. Little Ishtar here. Come along, don't be shy."

I heard a slight hiss, and a small head peeked out of his jacket. It was a small golden dragon with magenta eyes, which looked at me quizzically. She chirped softly, and her voice sounded metallic. Her long mobile neck stretched from underneath the jacket, and she peered at the hole. Warbling, she seemed to be saying that Alwyn was going to be the death of her, and then she delicately flamed the hole. When she was done fixing it, she rubbed her head against his face, and then quickly hid beneath his jacket again.

I wasn't amused that a holographic dragon was fixing his jacket, and I told him so.

"No. You're wrong, Sarah. She's not a hologram. This little lovely is the real thing, and she's terribly shy." He chirped at her softly, and her head slowly reappeared. "Say Hello to Sarah, dearest."

The dragon chirruped a greeting at me, and I smiled a fake smile.

"Charmed, I'm sure." The frost in my voice fell like an icicle, and it shattered on the floor. The wedge-shaped dragonhead quickly retreated back into the safety of Alwyn's jacket at my tone.

"You should be, she usually hides from everyone." Alwyn took something from one pocket, and moved his hand to where she was hiding. "You did a lovely job, dearest."

I was amazed, as there was the sound of 'dragon snacks' being eaten coming from his pocket. She was a rather vocal feeder.

"She's a hologram, Alwyn. Must you feed her snacks?" I asked.

There was a slight hiss from the jacket, and Alwyn began trying to soothe Ishtar.

"Now, now, Ishtar. Don't be upset, she didn't realize that you were real. She's heard about that other dragon, that hologram. Can I introduce the two of you lovely ladies to one another? Ishtar is rather shy, and she was rather besotted with Paedrig."

I heard a chirp in agreement. "Paedrig?"

"My partner. I think she had a little bit of a crush on him, when he was alive." There was a hiss, and Alwyn looked amused. "I am not jealous, Ishtar. Paedrig was a wonderful person who loved both of us. There are not that many golden dragons around now as most people try to hunt them down as a status symbol. I really should find another little golden dragon for her to meet up with, as I spend far too much time talking to her. She should be out doing dragony things, rather than keeping me company. Little Ishtar has been my familiar for years, and... well... I'd like the two of you to meet."

"You want me to meet a dragon, Alwyn?"

"Not just any dragon. ISHTAR." He pronounced her name deliberately. "Not A Dragon. Not IT. But Ishtar. Won't you agree just to humor an old man? I'd like the two lovely ladies in my life to finally meet."

"Alwyn." I was trying to warn him that I wasn't a lovely lady in his life.

He ignored me, just like Galen always had whenever cold, hard reality was attempting to readjust his viewpoint and I suddenly gasped in delight. Ishtar was beautiful. Smaller than my forearm, she was delicately sniffing at my hand.

"Now, Ishtar. This is Sarah. Sarah, this is Ishtar. You should stroke her behind the crest. She loves that, and I'm afraid I've been neglecting her a bit lately, what with Gideon the Madman's quest."

While I was scratching behind her crest, she began to croon in soft delight. Pretty soon, she was climbing up my arm, and she was nuzzling my face. Ishtar smelled of leather and brimstone, and she licked my face with her long scratchy tongue. She chirped at me, and I whistled at her. Her skin was soft, and she purred when I scratched a rather itchy spot.

"I knew this would happen. I see that you've quite enchanted my golden dragon, Sarah. Much like her master, I'm afraid." His tone was soft, and sad.

"Alwyn..." I wanted to be gentle with him, but I couldn't let him get his hopes up. In spite of his habit of causing complete chaos whenever he showed up, I honestly liked him. He made me laugh, and we talked easily about a multitude of topics. There was no hope for a relationship between a Mage and a doctor, but I found myself touched by how embarrassed he looked after he'd admitted that he was interested in me. OK, it improved my mood significantly to find out that a Mage could be interested in a mere Terran like myself.

"Sorry. Just the musings of a lonely old man." He gave me a bright smile, and Ishtar suddenly returned to him, understanding that her master needed to be consoled. Chirping, she rubbed his face, and he motioned at her to go back to her hiding place.

"Put the chemicals away, Sarah. It's time for you to get out of the lab." Alwyn's voice had suddenly turned from his usual whimsical, harmless male voice to one of quiet conviction. "You're far too energetic and vivacious to be in here tonight. I was wondering if you'd be interested in seeing a play with me. I rather enjoy the theatrical arts, and I have front row tickets to a Broadway show."

"Alwyn. I can't get to New York." I looked at him in chagrin. Yes, with a Technomage as a date, I could probably get to New York in time. "I've got nothing to wear."

"You look lovely in everything," Alwyn assured me softly, and I heard an answering chirp from Ishtar. "And she agrees." There was brief spat of metallic noise, and Alwyn laughed. "But she wants you to ditch the lab coat."

Alwyn continued breaking into the Treatment Center, and I grew more and more amused by him. He'd always show up with Ishtar, and try to get me away from the never-ending piles of stuff that needed to be done yesterday, just so that I'd have a chance to get away and relax. He loved music, theater and opera, and he would always try to tempt me into joining him for a night out. Alwyn would wheedle and cajole me by commenting on how all work and no play made Sarah a very dull individual. So despite my promises to keep myself chained to my microscope for sixteen hours a day, I'd find myself going out on... well, I guess I could call it a date.

Everyone began getting used to Alwyn showing up now and then, and I was surprised when the gossip mill didn't start churning out rumors about our alleged involvement. Then again, maybe I shouldn't have been as I caught Alwyn gently threatening someone about having such a loose tongue that he'd have to tie a knot in it.

Alwyn wouldn't do that, now would he?

---

We talked a great deal, on those times when we went out for a late dinner. I was lonely, and rather uncomfortable with socializing with my co-workers, so I looked forward to when Alwyn would show up. I mean, I'd had that slight nervous breakdown in the not so distant past, and I was leery of being too open with my colleagues, because they might start asking me questions that I didn't want to answer, not just yet. The two of us would walk for hours, carefully not touching, while we talked about anything that popped into our minds.

There were a few subjects that were too painful to broach, so Alwyn never asked me questions about how the death of the last of the Zanderi on Theta 49 had pushed me to breaking point a year before, nor how I'd coped with the loss of my sister and niece three months earlier. The cure that Alwyn and I had found hadn't come soon enough for them.

And I never asked him about Paedrig. Having loved deeply and lost, I guess we were being careful about old wounds and emotional scars. He kept me updated on the Excalibur crew, as he'd been keeping an eye on them for ages now and he commented on a few of the mishaps that had occurred. I didn't think Gideon would be happy to know that Alwyn thought it was hysterically funny when he and John Matheson had been arrested for solicitation. The Technomage told me how he'd been tempted to leave them in that jail, but how he'd eventually felt obliged to send me the message to go bail them out of their mess.

"They dismiss me as a slightly crazed and harmless old man." He admitted, and I had laughed. The Mage had appeared discomforted by my laugh, until I assured him I would never dismiss him that easily.

"Thank you, Sarah. I appreciate it. You've brightened my life up considerably. You know that, don't you?"

Alwyn gave me a rather tender smile, which caused me to suddenly reach over and kiss him on his cheek. I missed or he turned his face, and our lips met. It was a gentle kiss, and then he put his hands to my face. It was a soft, almost hesitant kiss, and suddenly I found myself responding to him wholeheartedly. In the back of my mind, I was screaming at myself to stop kissing him, as I knew things could get explosive quickly.

His hands holding me suddenly tightened, and the universe stopped dead. I could hear Ishtar in the background, bugling a warning, or was it encouragement? I realized that I'd better stop right now.

"Alwyn." I pulled away, and he gave me an intense look. His thumb was stroking the side of my face, and I suddenly felt something that I'd thought couldn't happen between us. No longer did he look like an innocent man. The façade that hid his dangerous interior was now long gone. There were shivers racing through my body from where his thumb was stroking my face, and I knew he wanted me, and it would be... intense. There would be no innocent fumbblings in the dark, as Alwyn was looking at me with an obvious desire. He knew exactly what he wanted to do to me, and at that moment, I wanted it, desperately.

I was tired of being lonely, tired of hiding behind my own shattered and cracked façade, but I was all too aware of how wrong this was. He was a Technomage, and he was far more experienced than I. My counselors had warned me not to get involved with anyone, not just yet, as I was still grieving for

my personal tragedies. But Alwyn had his own grief to deal with, so why couldn't we comfort one another?

"I am so sorry, my dear one. I'd better leave now, and I won't come back. Forgive me?"

"My fault. But you'd better go, or else..." I whispered that softly.

"Or else... what?" He gave me a gentle grin to encourage me to keep talking.

"I'll... want you to seduce me."

"Really?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Sounds... positively delightful."

I nodded my head.

"So how would like me to seduce you?"

"Alwyn..."

"Sarah? Mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually? For I promise you that I'll make sure you enjoy it completely on whatever level you desire. And you do desire it, don't you, my love?" His thumb continued to caress my cheek, and his eyes burned with passion.

"Alwyn. Please, be gentle. I'm still... a little emotionally fragile after... what happened."

---

He took me to his ship, quickly, as though fearing that I would change my mind. Holding me tightly, he kept whispering to me not to be afraid, and that he would be gentle.

My heart was pounding, when we arrived at his ship. Nervous, as though this was my first time; I was shaking.

"Easy, dearest. Easy. I won't do this if you're afraid or uncomfortable."

"No. Just nervous. I've never made love with a Technomage before." I tried to tease him, and he gave me a gentle smile.

"Take tomorrow off work," he ordered with a roguish grin.

"Why?"

"Because this is going to be a long, and deliberate process. It could take days, Sarah. Does that frighten you?"

"No. It astounds me, actually."

"Close your eyes. I want you to just concentrate on floating."

I was floating in darkness, with the most beautiful operatic aria wafting around me, and I could feel his hands on my face. My Mage was telling me to relax, and to let the world slip away from me. For tonight, there would be no grief, no pain and no plague.

"You've forgotten yourself in your grief, Sarah. That's not good. I know how it can be, to be lost in unending grief, so for tonight let it go. Your ghosts will not find you here. Let your muscles relax, and let go of the sorrow that fills your soul."

I know your road,  
every step that you will make  
your closed anxieties and the emptiness  
stones you will dismiss  
without ever thinking that  
like rock, I return in you

He was behind me, whispering to me about what he was going to do to me.

"Slowly, gently, as this is not going to be a mere physical seduction, my Sarah. This will be a mental, emotional and spiritual seduction. Drift, uncaring of your past, uncaring of your future. Relax, and concentrate on just hearing my voice."

I know your every breath.  
all you do not want  
You knew well you do not live  
you cannot recognize it

I was feeling something quivering in my backbone, and he began touching my spine. "I know you can feel it. Your skin is so sensitive, and there's a wonderful warmth spreading in your back. Concentrate, focus on it."

For love  
have you ever done anything  
only for love?  
have you ever defied the wind and cried out  
divided the heart itself  
paid and bet again

behind this obsession

that remains only mine.

He was tracing glyphs and sigils on my skin, and his touch was like fire on my body and soul. How I wanted him to stop teasing me, but how I enjoyed this slow, deliberate pace. From the spine, he then concentrated on my neck, shoulders and arms, and then slowly he focused on my hands and fingers. After fully arousing them, he drifted back up to my shoulders, and then began moving downward. I gave a slight moan of disappointment when he ignored my breasts, and instead continued drawing sigils on my sternum and belly.

"No, not yet. Soon, when you're fully prepared."

He dwelt on my hips, then focused on my legs and toes. Each touch caused my craving to increase, and I felt almost ablaze with desire.

"How do you feel?"

I tried to speak, but found that I couldn't do more than moan, "Please?"

"Not yet, not yet." His voice was amused, and he whispered in some foreign tongue.

for love

have you ever spent everything reason

your pride up to the tears?

you know I remain

I have no pretext

only an obsession

that is still strong and mine

inside the soul you tear away

Whatever he said made my body feel as though it was on the very pinnacle, just before that final release, and I began shivering.

"No. Not yet. We've ignored several very important spots, haven't we?"

His callused hands were gentle as he traced signs of power on my breasts. Arching my back, I tried to get more contact between his hands and my body, and he laughed gently.

"No. Patience. I've told you that this isn't just on the physical realm." Whispering again, I felt my desire increase ever so slightly more. Whimpering, I tried not to beg when I felt his hands on my nipples. He used one of his fingernails on them, to draw the smallest of magical signatures on them, and then he whispered again. Every part of me was fiery with longing, except for the two spots that he hadn't



touched yet. He kept me in that state of high arousal for some time, whispering to me softly about how I needed to relax, and enjoy. Slowly he increased my sensitivity, until I knew I was on the very edge.

And I tell you now

sincere with myself

how much it costs me to know you are

not mine

and it would be as if

all the seas

drowned in me.

Then tenderly he spread my legs apart, and used his fingers to write more words of power, while he muttered in a soft voice. I felt myself being filled, stretched by something that wasn't there, and I suddenly knew what he was going to do next. But he didn't; instead, he kissed me for some time, while my body begged for release. My Mage teased me by nuzzling my neck, and then slowly kissing his way down my body until he reached the lone area of my body that he hadn't marked. Using his tongue on me, he marked my clit, and I found myself screaming when he finally finished my seduction.

Then I blacked out, as I heard Ishtar shrieking her approval.

---

I woke slowly, and I realized that the ever-present headache that I'd had for the last three years of my life was gone. Stretching out, I felt snug and warm in bed.

Where the hell did the bed come from? Last thing I knew, I was floating and now I was in bed. There was a lot of room in the bed, I noted with approval, as I could stretch out to my heart's content. It felt good to be able to flex, as my muscular tension and stress had disappeared. Dimly, I remembered being put to bed and then being massaged vigorously by a strong pair of hands. Hmmm... now it was coming back to me, and I could remember quite a bit more.

At the edge of my mind, I could hear a conversation of sorts, at least, if the sound of bending metal could be considered a conversation. One was high-pitched, and the other voice was a rather mellow masculine voice that sounded amused.

Oh yes. Alwyn and that rather nosy dragon of his. It was disconcerting to be basking in the afterglow, and to realize that his damned dragon was sitting on the headboard, crooning delightfully.

"Does she always do that?" I asked which caused Alwyn to laugh.

"I'm afraid so. Paedrig was a free spirit, so he didn't mind..."

Ah. Time to face the morning after, and see what doubts and uncertainties we both had. Alwyn had taken me in literally every possible way in the past day [DAYS?] and it had been blissful. Now it was

time for a reality check. I turned over to face him, and I was amused to find him studiously ignoring me, while he was playing with Ishtar, who was now lying next to him in bed. He was scratching her belly, and the two of them appeared to be finishing their conversation. Foolishly, I hoped that Ishtar was telling Alwyn that she approved of me. After all, it would be hard to come between a man and his dragon.

I was completely taken aback when I realized that Alwyn the Technomage wasn't the real Alwyn. No, instead, he was decades [possibly even centuries?] younger. He had first seduced me as the older Alwyn, and then had shown me what he truly looked like. If he were a Terran, I'd assume he was in his fifties, but he'd flatly refused to answer my question about exactly how old he was.

He'd been a little embarrassed about revealing who he really was after we'd made love repeatedly, but I assured him that it was OK. The real Alwyn appeared to be a deeply introspective individual with a razor sharp sense of humor, and no doubt he had his reasons for using the 'ancient Mage' façade.

I think it was because he wanted to make sure that I truly cared for him, even as the older Alwyn. What a silly, lonely Mage. If implants didn't bother me, why would a few years?

"It's amazing, that you can fit a bed big enough to take a doctor, a Mage, and a dragon in a ship of this size." Moving closer to Ishtar, I began scratching her, and she butted my hand in approval.

"Magic, Sarah. Magic." Alwyn assured me somberly.

I couldn't help it, but I laughed, and the old trickster gave me a bemused look.

"So, what now?" I asked, hoping that maybe we could have an occasional friendly fuck, just between friends of course. It had been enjoyable to forget about everything for a while.

"We can't tell them, Sarah. They won't be happy that you're involved with me. After all, I am a Mage." He sighed. "They tolerate me only because they think that I'm the lesser of two evils. Gideon and the rest are using me for their own ends, and I have agreed to their game because I was lonely. Even with my golden beauty here, I was very lonely. So I played the game, letting them think me a foolish, whimsical man, but I know that they won't approve of such a character being involved with you. They'll be afraid that I'll hurt you unintentionally. Such fools, Sarah. I've never hurt anyone in my life, just occasionally knocked someone's pride down to manageable levels."

"Alwyn."

"Yes?"

"Shut up and kiss me."

And he did, while being careful not to jar Ishtar.

---

October 2269

"Do you think that Gideon and Demon will get back together?" I lay snuggled in Alwyn's arm aboard his ship, on our way back to Earth. It shouldn't have surprised me that his bedroom was as 'traditional' as his study, but the sight of a four-poster bed on a Technomage ship still amused me.

Still, it gave plenty of scope for some interesting games, and Alwyn and I had played many of them in the weeks since we'd become lovers. Ishtar sat on the rail at the foot of the bed and watched us carefully. I could have sworn that the expression on her face was approving.

He pulled me closer into his arms and kissed my head. "Of course they will. Those two would find their way across a universe of troubles to be with each other. And Demon's a very persistent lady. She's found her man, and she won't give him up, although frankly what she sees in that mad man is beyond me."

I looked up from where my head lay on his shoulder and grinned. "She's not the only woman who's fallen for a mad man and won't let him go."

Alwyn laughed softly and kissed me again. "It's a good job that Demon was distracted, or she'd have been on to us in an instant. She does have a very handy right hook though, doesn't she? Now, let's forget about them for a while. They'll sort things out for themselves, and Galen is sticking his nose back into their affairs again. The last thing they need is two Technomages interfering. So I think I'll start interfering with something much more interesting..."

His voice trailed off as his hands moved down my body and started doing things to me that no one had ever done before. I don't know who screamed louder when I came, Ishtar or me.

---

## December 2270

### Matthew Gideon

2270 had disappeared on me faster than any previous year of my life. It had been a good year, full of interesting people and places, and we'd made excellent progress on our mission. The Kesani had joined the Interstellar Alliance, and we'd found three other prospective members, so Sheridan was pleased with progress and had authorized continued exploration. I'd got John his promotion to Commander, managed to banish the Joneses from his life and my ship for as long as our mission lasted, but best of all was having Deborah and Marcus with me. Going to sleep next to my wife every night and waking up in her arms every morning, I never had problems sleeping any more.

I woke up early, even before Marcus for once, and lay thinking quietly for a while, holding Deborah against my side, listening to her breathing, smiling as I thought about telling her that she still snored. Very softly, very quietly, but a definite snore.

The holidays were fast approaching, and I'd managed to arrange things so that we had a stop over at Babylon 5 for a few days during that period, for re-supplying the ship and R&R for the crew. We'd contacted Max, and he was bringing Ilas, Dureena and Vya out to meet us there. Deborah and her sisters had been ecstatic, when they'd heard the news. They hadn't seen Ilas for over a year and despite all the messages that went flying back and forth between them, [Note to self, better buy the communication techs something nice. They'd been working overtime to keep up with the traffic,] they were eager to see their sister again. I was looking forward to seeing Dureena again, too. And Max... maybe.

Through Galen, I'd even managed to contact Alwyn, and he'd promised to bring himself and Sarah to meet us on B5. Interesting that the old Technomage was bringing my former ship's doctor. I'd often wondered whether their relationship had developed further, but I'd heard little from either of them since

we'd left Mars over a year before. It was going to be a real reunion for a few days. Given the personalities I was bringing together, I wondered who would end up dead. Probably me. No, on second thoughts, I had Deborah to protect me now, she wouldn't let any of my erstwhile crew kill me. She'd do it herself.

And I didn't have to face Liz Lochley again, thank God! The previous meeting between Liz and Deborah had given me nightmares for weeks. Fortunately, Liz had moved on to a new post in Earthforce Security several months earlier, and the new commander of B5 was an old academy buddy. Knowing Ben, he'd be able to set me up with a decent poker game at some point. I just had to keep him away from John and Deborah, so he couldn't tell them outrageous stories about out youthful misdemeanors. They really didn't need any more ammunition. John had 'turnips'; that was quite enough.

I sighed and stretched lazily. Life was good, and it got even better when the lady of my life stirred in my arms and started to kiss her way down my chest and stomach, her ultimate objective clear.

---

Looking across the dinner table at Alwyn and Sarah, I wondered again just how good friends they now were. It had been a year and a half since Alwyn and I had talked in Medbay, and he'd told me how he felt about Sarah. OK, so I butted in and wheedled it out of him. It's my duty as Captain to know everything important that goes on aboard my ship. That's my excuse anyway. They gave every appearance of being just good friends, but call me suspicious--OK, nosy--but I was getting more and more convinced that something else was going on.

We made a large, noisy group in the Fresh Air restaurant on B5. Booking a table for twelve at short notice during the holiday season had been a challenge, and I'd thought that it was my name that had got us in, but when I saw the size of the backhand Max gave the maitre d' when we arrived, I revised my opinion.

We'd left the kids in the Medbay crèche and come out for a night on the town, all dressed up with some place to go. John and I had avoided dress uniforms for once, but that just meant we'd got bullied into wearing tuxedos. So John, Max, Luke and I looked like penguins, while Galen wore his usual little black number. Alwyn was the big surprise, turning up in a tux that made Max's look shabby, and made mine look like something regurgitated by a Pak'ma'ra.

I decided that Alwyn was just showing off for the beautiful woman he had on his arm. Sarah looked fantastic in a silver dress that covered everything and concealed nothing. She certainly had a stunning figure, and that dress displayed every curve of it.

The other women looked equally gorgeous, but to me none ever compared to my Deborah. She wore that black clinging dress that I always wanted to tear off her and I knew that she had nothing on underneath it but those black lace-top stockings. [Down boy! Down!] After more than a year of marriage, I still salivated whenever I saw my wife, and in that dress... Let's just say that walking became a challenge for me for a while.

Lily looked striking in green, her bright red curls flowing down her back and her advanced pregnancy somehow making her more beautiful than ever. I looked at her swollen belly and wondered. Luke had told me that she was carrying a little girl. Not for the first time, I wondered if she'd have hazel eyes. Angel was in her hallmark red, and as usual, looked too hot to handle.

The food and wine had been superb, the company excellent, and we were now relaxing with coffee and brandy, both the real things for once. As host of this little event I knew that the bill would be astronomical but what the hell, that's what credits are for. And Ben had got me into a nice little game the day before that had turned out to be extremely profitable.

So I sat with my arm around my best girl, surrounded by my friends, with a nice buzz on from the wine and brandy, feeling pretty damn mellow and kindly toward my fellow man and woman. I never did know when to leave well enough alone.

I leaned closer to Deborah and whispered, "Do you think that Alwyn and Sarah are... you know... doing it?"

She turned with an amused expression and spoke so that only I could hear. "Doing it? Doing what? Fucking?"

I nearly choked on the brandy. I should have known better. Deborah always did like to tease me in public. Once I'd stopped coughing, assured the others that I was fine, just fine, and conversation had resumed, I leaned across to her and whispered, "OK, yes, fucking. Are they?" If anyone would know, Deborah would. Being married to an empath certainly had its uses, particularly when she came and sat next to me at poker games. As she had the day before.

She smiled and kissed me on the ear, murmuring, "Yes, and apparently Alwyn's a randy old goat," before turning back to resume her conversation with Luke.

I couldn't help but smile broadly. [I've got you now, you bastard. Time to turn the tables on the Technomage.]

We went dancing after dinner--well, I call it dancing anyway. Deborah tells me that it isn't dancing when I grab her ass and shuffle from foot to foot, landing on her feet as often as not. Why should I care? When I have her in my arms and have both hands full of the most beautiful ass in the galaxy, I don't give a damn what anyone calls it, I'm happy. And for some strange reason, despite crushed toes and the imprint of my fingers on her butt, so is she.

---

"Command over-ride Gideon. Password 'Full House'." The door to Sarah's quarters slid open silently, and I stepped inside. I'd managed to persuade everyone to come back to the ship after the dancing, then arranged for a little problem with the landing bay doors. We'd all got in without difficulty, but somehow when Galen and Alwyn tried to go back to their ships, the doors had stuck fast. They both gestured and fumed until the doors glowed ultra-violet, but nothing would shift them. Amazing how effective a couple of large wedges can be, after two very hefty Narn Marines have hammered them into place.

They finally gave up and accepted my kindly offer of accommodation, until I could get the problem fixed. I felt it was particularly thoughtful of me to put Alwyn next door to Sarah, while telling Galen that the only thing I had suitable for him was way down the other end of the ship. He was lucky that I didn't tell him to go ride the bullet car.

Deborah knew exactly what I was up to and warned me to be careful. "I don't want you turned into a frog or something. I've never been that fond of amphibians, so don't hop back to me expecting me to kiss you and turn you back into a prince."

So I told her that I thought I was supposed to be her favorite snake, and then showed her why she'd called me that. Which meant that I hadn't got much sleep before getting up and preparing the tray that I now held, as my only defense against the wrath of a Technomage.

I put the tray down carefully on the table in the living area of Sarah's rooms and tip toed over to the bedroom door, which the happy couple had thoughtfully left slightly ajar. I could just hear a gentle snoring coming from the bedroom, the same sort of sound that Deborah had been making when I'd left her. I stuck my head slowly through the gap, and the sight that met my eyes fulfilled my wildest expectations.

Sarah was sprawled across the bed, face down, [I couldn't get *that* lucky,] with the sheet just covering her ass. Her long back led up to broad shoulders and hair that looked like a haystack. It takes a great deal of friction against a pillow to produce that totally matted effect. I know that from experience. I've spent many a happy hour getting Deborah's hair into exactly that state. Hell, I've ended up with my own hair like that on more than one occasion.

Alwyn was laid on his back next to her, hogging the sheet, [I can be thankful for small mercies,] so he was covered from mid chest down. Between them, on the pillow, sat a small golden dragon. To my surprise, I discovered it was the dragon that was snoring.

I'd opened my mouth to shout as loud as I could, when I realized that the snoring had stopped and four eyes were now peering at me. Two were magenta and glared from the narrowest of slits in the dragon's face. I swallowed hard, wondering if anything that small could possibly be as dangerous as it looked right then. The other two eyes were bright blue and if anything, managed to look even more dangerous than the dragon.

Alwyn spoke softly. "Make the slightest sound, and Commander Matheson will receive an immediate, and extremely well deserved promotion to Captain."

I smiled weakly and shook my head, trying to convey with my eyebrows that I would never dream of making any noise under any circumstances whatsoever, and certainly not when I had four of the scariest eyes in the galaxy glaring at me. I started to back out of the bedroom, when Alwyn stopped me with a gesture. I have no idea what he did, but I froze in place, completely unable to move. I watched in horror as he started to get out of the bed and closed my eyes hurriedly. There are some sights that even a Starship Captain can't face early in the morning. I could only hope that Sarah's medical training had prepared her for that.

"Ishtar. Guard him. The slightest noise, and you can kill him."

There was a soft metallic chirp from the holographic dragon.

When I opened my eyes again, Alwyn was standing in front of me, a black robe wrapped around him and the dragon perched on his shoulder. It had to be a hologram, but it was a damned good one, no visible flickering at all. It *had* to be a hologram. He gestured again and I could move, which I did rapidly. Backwards.

Perhaps I should be truthful, as this might be my last confession. I didn't move voluntarily. I was propelled backwards by a gesture from an angry Mage while his dragon hologram followed me like a jailer. It was hissing and spitting at me, mad as... well, as mad as a seriously pissed off dragon can get at being woken from its nap. It was obviously not an early-morning dragon. I decided not to ask if

it had gotten out of the wrong side of the bed.

For a moment, while I was flying backwards, Alwyn's appearance seemed to flicker. Instead of the slightly eccentric, elderly Mage that I was used to seeing, instead there appeared a man only a decade or so older than I. He was in fighting form, with the look of a person who, when confronted with street toughs, would urbanely and politely correct their manners and then leave them, a bloody pulp on the street, while he walked away for afternoon tea and cucumber sandwiches, no doubt with the crusts cut off. Which probably meant that the doddering, slightly senile, Technomage facade was an act.

For whatever reason, Alwyn had decided to portray himself as harmless, which I'd stupidly believed. All this time, I'd figured Galen was the more dangerous of the two Mages, and dismissed Alwyn as being the lesser of two evils. Viewing the thundering look of absolute rage in his blue eyes, I realized that Alwyn was a hell of a lot more dangerous than Galen. What a truly comforting last thought.

After I'd hit the bulkhead at speed, and bounced off it, it took me a minute to regain my equilibrium. Looking at Alwyn, I was suddenly confused again. He appeared as he usually did, in his seventies, radiating Alwyn the doddering, though apparently lecherous, Technomage act. In the back of my mind, I suddenly wondered if Alwyn dropped the act with Sarah, and in which 'appearance' he'd seduced her.

Alwyn followed me into the living room, his face fixed in a stony stare. [Oh hell, Matt, you've blown it this time. Why the fuck don't you listen to your wife?] I gestured at the tray that I'd left on the table, and after he'd pulled the door closed behind him, whispered as quietly as I could, "I thought Sarah might like some breakfast."

His face didn't even flicker. He just continued to stare as he said softly, menacingly, "Is this a new part of your duties, Captain? Bringing breakfast in bed to your houseguests? Or did you have some other activity in mind when you broke into Sarah's quarters?"

I stared at him in horror. Did he really think that I'd over-ridden the locks to Sarah's rooms so that I could come in and... "You have got to be joking! Deborah would cut my balls off and eat them in front of me, if she ever thought I'd gone looking for another woman!" OK, so I was lying, but Alwyn didn't need to know that.

Alwyn's smile was malicious. "That's if I leave her anything to cut. Don't worry, Captain, I'll make sure that your widow is well taken care of. I believe there's a lawyer on Mars who'd be happy to take over from you."

"Now that's not funny! Come on, Alwyn, it was just a joke. You caught Deborah and me in an awkward position once or twice, I thought it might be fun to..." I trailed off as his face turned back to stone. The dragon on his shoulder leaned forward and hissed at me. It *had* to be a hologram. It was a rather angry looking hologram, and far more detailed than the ones of Alwyn's I'd seen previously. The intelligent eyes were whirling and crimson, its fangs were exposed, and those were easily six or so centimetres of titanium claws that were itching to get themselves around my throat. Its scales were a multitude of varying shades of gold, and its wingspan was over a meter.

Then it let loose a tongue of flame that scorched my ear, and I could smell the awful stench of burning hair. My hair. That was no hologram.

I pointed to the tray again. "Fresh coffee, Alwyn, the real thing. I had it brought up from Fresh Air this morning, and freshly squeezed orange juice, too. I was going to make it up to you afterwards.

See?" That whining voice hadn't come from me, had it? Oh, yes, it had. That damned dragon had me scared witless.

His face relaxed a little, and so did I as he bent forward to sniff the coffee and examine the tray more carefully. "What's that?" He pointed to the covered dish in the center of the tray. Suddenly, that part of the joke didn't seem quite such a good idea.

"Uh, toast."

Alwyn leaned forward and sniffed. The bastard had too good a sense of smell to let me get away with that one. "There's something else. Not just toast. Tell me, or Ishtar here will be making toast of you, Captain."

By now the dragon's snout was no more than ten centimeters from my nose. I closed my eyes and thought one last farewell to my wife and son. "Peanut butter."

There was a long silence, and when I didn't feel my face being incinerated, I opened one eye warily. Alwyn and his dragon had moved away and were inspecting the tray again. Alwyn had lifted the cover, and the dragon had its nose buried in the pile of peanut butter covered toast. The pair of them turned to me and smiled. And yes, even the damned dragon smiled. If you've never seen a dragon smile, then you haven't lived.

Then the damned thing climbed up my arm. Taking all my years of training in Earthforce, I managed not to throw the demon thing off when I first felt its... her claws. Fortunately she didn't draw blood, as she was trying to be delicate. Damn, she was heavy, especially since I was trying my hardest not to jar her. All I could think of was if I moved my arm, she'd latch on and then I'd die from loss of blood. Deborah would kill me, if I let that happen. The dragon looked at me, and then her head drew closer. When she opened her mouth, I nearly passed out as I thought she was going to flame me. Instead, she warbled and then rubbed her head against mine, but I wish she hadn't rubbed my scorched ear. I think she was saying thanks, but why the hell did she have to smear the peanut butter all over the side of my face?

"Why thank you, Captain. Ishtar is very fond of peanut butter. You've made one of my ladies very happy this morning."

I made a mental note that the next time Alwyn showed up, I'd have an assortment of gourmet peanut butters ready for Ishtar. Nothing would be too good for her. I wondered how much Minbari peanut butter was going to cost me. I was going to need Deborah to sit next to me in a lot more poker games.

The door to the bedroom slid open, and Sarah appeared in the doorway, the sheet wrapped around her. Her face was soft and relaxed, her eyes still unfocused and she had the look women only get when they have been well and truly satisfied. It's a look I see on Deborah's face every day. "Which of your ladies is that? Matt? Why is your hair burned off on one side? Why do you have peanut butter smeared on your face? In fact, what are you doing here?"

I gave her my most charming smile. "Room Service?"

---

When I got back to my quarters Deborah cut my hair, evening up the sides. Then she used the regenerator to fix my ear. I'm married to a saint, as she didn't once say, 'I told you so,' and her face



didn't have even a trace of a smirk. She just took me back to bed and consoled me. I needed a lot of consolation.

When we'd finished, she lay in my arms and kissed me gently, saying, "If you want to try room service again, then stick to servicing me in my room."

I think she may have a point.

---

## The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four G

{[Part 1: Room Service](#)} {[Part 2: Knives and Balls](#)}