

The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four K - Part 2: Shadows of the Past

by [The Space Witches](#)



A nightmare come alive...

Chapter 2 - Aliens

Gideon stood at the top of the shuttle ramp and took a deep breath of air, instantly regretting it, as his eyes burned, his nose twitched and the lining of his throat felt like someone had applied acid to it. He sneezed once, coughed twice, then rubbed the tears from his watering eyes. Their scans of the planet had indicated that the atmosphere was higher in oxygen and sulfur than Earth norms, but was breathable. For a few moments, Gideon wondered about that. What none of the scans could tell them was how the sulfurous smell would permeate the atmosphere, irritating the noses and throats of most of his party.

He turned to see how his companions were coping. His Narn Marine Sergeant, G'Tan, was breathing deeply and happily, a broad smile on his reptilian face. [Well, I'm glad somebody likes it!] The Minbari linguist, Dunall, looked less happy but was maintaining her race's usual stoicism in the face of discomfort. The Drazi shuttle pilot, who came out to join them after turning off the ship's systems, was more vocal in his disapproval.

"Pah! I thought it was only the inhabitants of this place that were supposed to stink, not the whole planet!" Gideon caught the movement of Dunall's hand as she turned off her translation device. [Good job one of my team has some diplomacy.]

He instructed the pilot to go back and stay inside, an order that the Drazi obeyed instantly, with a degree of enthusiasm his species rarely showed. Drazi were rather more sensitive to smells than others realized.

Gideon assembled the rest of his first contact team. Raven represented medicine and sciences, G'Tan was there from Security, Dunall from linguistics, and Ankaren was their Brakiri Sensor operator. The

Captain had chosen a multi-species team to show the Stryvsteptixi the true breadth of the Alliance they were being invited to join. They'd all been fully briefed before leaving the ship, and knew the greeting protocols that now awaited them.

Gideon had wanted to bring John Matheson with him, but had been prevented by two things. First, Earthforce had very well defined rules about when a Captain and First Officer could leave a ship together. This was not one of those times. Second, it appeared that the Stryvsteptixi were fearful of telepaths. They had none in their population and had a vehement dislike of the concept of telepathy that bordered on paranoia. Having a telepath down on the planet would have killed the negotiations on the first day.

Taking his team down the shuttle ramp, Gideon arranged them in the correct order of seniority that the Stryvsteptixi social system demanded, then waited. He braced himself as the locals approached them, knowing that if he thought the planet smelled bad, he was going to find its occupants one hell of a lot worse.

It didn't help that Trulann had been right. By human standards, only their mothers could love these people. The combination of very small, red, widely spaced eyes, with a large proboscis and a slash of a mouth, through which teeth approaching the size and shape of tusks protruded, gave the species an appearance that to humans looked distressingly pig like. Gideon pushed these thoughts away. [Handsome is as handsome does.] He prepared himself mentally for the greeting ritual that would involve him taking the leader of the delegation into a warm embrace. [The things I do for my people...]

Gideon looked around the mess hall and nodded his approval of the arrangements that had been made. They had now been in orbit above Stryvsteptix for a week and negotiations had gone well. They were close to reaching final agreement on the terms for the entry of the Stryvsteptixi into the Inter Stellar Alliance, terms that would benefit all parties. Gideon's main problem was that he was also close to having to agree terms for a divorce.

His return to the Excalibur after the first day of negotiations had *not* gone well. Gideon had noticed, as he'd made his way from the landing bay to his quarters, that his crew had tended to shuffle away from him in the bullet car and gave him a wide berth in the corridors. When the doors to his quarters opened, Marcus had been sitting on the floor playing with his toys. Looking up to see his father in the doorway, the child had scrambled to his feet and launched himself across the room with his usual reckless enthusiasm, screaming, "Daddy!" as he'd thrown himself into the air, totally secure in the knowledge that his father would catch him.

But this time Marcus had regretted his impulsiveness. As Gideon had caught him and lifted him above his head, grinning and shaking the child in the way he loved best, Marcus' face had crumpled. "Pooh! Daddy stinks!" He'd started to scream and struggle to get away.

Deborah had glanced up from where she sat on the sofa reading, and her nose had wrinkled. Before she could say anything, Gideon had put Marcus down, watching him run to his mother as he'd said, "I see he's inherited all your tact and diplomacy."

Deborah had smiled and stood, picking up her son and starting to move towards Gideon, but she had stopped a couple of paces away. "He's also inherited my habit of telling the truth. Matthew, you smell awful! It's like rotten eggs and shit combined. It's horrible! Please get out of those clothes and vibe yourself clean, or we'll never get the stink out of here."

Muttering to himself, "You used to want to get me out of my clothes for other reasons..." Gideon had headed for the bathroom. He'd sealed his uniform into a plastic bag before staying in the vibe shower for half an hour. When he'd finally emerged, he'd found that Deborah had taken away the bag with his clothes in it, and laid clean jeans and a T-shirt out on the bed. Dressing quickly, he'd gone back to the living room to find Deborah and Marcus playing on the floor. He'd squatted down to join them, kissing her forehead as he asked, "Better?"

She'd sniffed and shaken her head. "There's still a lingering odor. How about using some of that cologne Angel gave you for your birthday?" Gideon had sighed and gone back into the bathroom. The cologne Deborah had suggested was rather stronger than he liked, but if it meant she wouldn't flinch when he approached her... He'd doused himself thoroughly.

That had set the trend for each day that followed. After the second day, he'd had decontamination facilities and vibe showers set up just outside the landing bay, as the smell the negotiators brought back with them was beginning to spread throughout the ship. Having everyone decontaminate before they left the vicinity of the landing bay helped keep the smell down to mildly unpleasant rather than eye-wateringly offensive. Even so, Gideon was becoming persona non-grata in his own quarters. He'd used nearly the entire bottle of Angel's cologne, but Deborah and Marcus still recoiled when he arrived home each evening. And the ship's laundry was close to mutiny about the state of the clothes being sent down to them for cleaning.

The previous night had been the final straw. He'd slid into bed next to Deborah, feeling unusually aroused and passionate. He'd leaned over to kiss her, and she'd turned her head aside. "I'm sorry, Matthew, but you taste nearly as bad as you smell. Please don't!"

For the first time Gideon could remember since the days after Marcus was born, they hadn't made love when sleeping together. He'd felt hurt by her rejection and had taken offense at her comment, so he'd rolled onto his side, his back turned to her. That morning, Gideon had risen as soon as he'd woken and left without speaking to his wife. He knew that he was being childish, he knew that she was right, he did smell bad, and yes, he probably tasted bad too, but it wasn't his fault!

The Captain sighed deeply and went back to checking the preparations for that evening's reception. The Stryvsteptixi had shown some interest in seeing the *Excalibur*, so to celebrate the progress they were making, Gideon had arranged to hold a party on board. Ten of the Stryvsteptixi diplomatic mission would be attending, with their life partners.

He'd ensured that they used the mess hall nearest to the landing bay, in a hopeless attempt to stop the smell from the visitors spreading throughout the whole ship. He knew that this was doomed to failure. The leader of the delegation had just requested a tour of the ship for himself and his partners, one of whom was a starship engineer, and the rest of the visitors had quickly requested that they be included in the tour.

The partnership arrangements of the Stryvsteptixi just added to the complexity of the evening. They had two sexes, but Gideon had long ceased trying to distinguish them. Whichever sex they were, their social class dictated whether they took a dominant or submissive role in the relationship. The family arranged all first partnerships, but once a Stryvsteptixi dominant reached a particular rank in society, he or she was allowed to choose a second submissive partner. All of the delegation they had met had progressed to this stage so all had two partners. This meant they would have a total of thirty Stryvsteptixi on board.

Gideon had tried to explain that ISA members had a wide variety of arrangements for reproduction and relationships, but it soon became clear that if he turned up at a social event with only one wife, his status in the eyes of the Stryvsteptixi would diminish considerably, and the membership negotiations could founder. So at lunchtime, he'd gritted his teeth and gone back to his quarters to tell Deborah that a) she was going to have to pretend to be submissive for the evening, [See that pig flying past the porthole? Oops, sorry no, that's the leader of the Stryvsteptixi delegation!] and b) he planned to ask Angel to act as his second wife. Gideon still had no idea which of the two things had resulted in the ornament skimming past his ear, as he'd ducked back out of the door. He hadn't seen Deborah again since.

Thanking the team who had put so much effort into preparing the mess hall for the reception, and stopping for one last word with the cook, Gideon headed for his quarters to change into his dress uniform. He was NOT looking forward to the evening.

Gideon looked around at the gathering in the mess hall, and suppressed a sigh of relief. It had all gone better than he'd expected. Deborah was behaving herself beautifully, standing at his side, following his lead, and giving the perfect impression of a dutiful, submissive wife. He knew he was going to pay for that later.

Angel was quite another matter. Her impression of a submissive came from a rather different angle. She clung to his arm and purred like a kitten, occasionally flashing him glances from her sparkling blue eyes, full of humor and mischief. Gideon knew damned well that anyone who tried to pet that kitten would find they'd got a tiger by the tail. Although he had to admit that he was lucky enough to have two of the most beautiful women in the galaxy standing either side of him, so he couldn't complain too much.

When he'd returned to his rooms, Gideon had found that Deborah was already ensconced in the bathroom of her quarters, so he'd gone through Marcus' bedroom to use the other bathroom. Marcus was nowhere in sight, so he'd assumed that Deborah had already dropped their son off at the Medbay crèche. Gideon had vibed again, in the increasingly hopeless attempt to get rid of the lingering smell that now followed him everywhere, then got his dress uniform from where it hung in the wardrobe in Marcus' room.

He hated the uniform with a passion, and hadn't been able to help feeling envious of John Matheson, who was going to be in civilian dress that night. He would be present as one of Raven's submissive partners, and one thing Gideon was looking forward to was seeing how Lily would behave in that role. Somehow, he didn't see the fiery little redhead relishing that part any more than Deborah would. Keeping John in civilian attire also prevented potentially embarrassing questions as to the meaning of the Psi symbol that adorned all of his uniforms.

When Gideon had finally crossed back to Deborah's living area, she and her sister had been waiting for him. The sight they'd presented had literally taken his breath away. Deborah wore his favorite dress, the one that was just a simple tube of black material that clung to her every curve. He could see that she was wearing her black stockings under it and had silently prayed that she wouldn't kick him out of her bed later that night.

If she did, the temptation to try and take refuge in Angel's bed was almost overpowering. She wore her hair up, but loose tendrils fell about her face and ears. Her red velvet dress left her shoulders bare and plunged at the front, to display a cleavage a man could drown in. From there the dress clung to her

body, hips and thighs, stopping just above her knees. She wore matching high heels that tightened her calves and lengthened her legs beautifully. Unlike her sister, Angel wore jewelry, with white gold and diamond studs sparkling in her ears, and a simple white gold wishbone shaped necklace resting on her collarbones, drawing the eye directly to the stunning cleavage below. The necklace had been a gift from Gideon and Deborah on Angel's last birthday, and this was the first chance she'd had to wear it at a formal function.

Gideon had told them both how stunning they looked and held out his arms. They'd each taken his elbow and followed him to the mess hall, Angel chatting excitedly, Deborah ominously silent.

He and his negotiating team had formed a line to welcome their visitors, each with two companions. G'Tan had asked two of the female Narn Marines to act as his partners for the night, and Gideon had been convinced that this would lead to disaster. He'd never met a submissive female Narn and wasn't sure he ever wanted to, but both had behaved impeccably when their guests arrived. The rest of his team had all found suitable partners for themselves for the evening.

Herding thirty curious Stryvsteptixi around the Excalibur had proved a challenge, and eventually he'd had to ask G'Tan and his partners to act as 'sweepers', making sure that none of the guests wandered off the tour route. At one point, they'd lost one of the delegation leader's partners, and the leader had got quite agitated until she was found. Gideon had been hugely relieved when they'd finally shepherded the whole party back to the mess hall and started the party proper.

The only down side to the evening was that Deborah had hardly spoken to him. That bothered him, as she wasn't normally a sulker; that was his specialty. Deborah would usually come straight out with what was bothering her, almost regardless of the consequences. Tonight she'd appeared distracted. Several times he'd noticed her watching the Stryvsteptixi with a frown on her face. Gideon wondered what was bothering her, surely not the physical appearance of the species? Deborah hadn't batted an eyelid when she met her first Pak'ma'ra, and by comparison, this lot were downright handsome. He decided to talk to her later... if she'd talk to him.

It was late by the time the visitors showed any inclination to leave, and Gideon was horrified to find that, having spent several hours in close quarters with them, he'd become inured to the stench. He could no longer smell them or himself. As he saw the last of the shuttles off, he wondered if his nose would ever return to normal.

"Tell me what's bothering you." Gideon asked his wife, kissing Deborah's head as she lay in his arms. When the Stryvsteptixi had left, Angel had wished them goodnight, and he'd walked back to his quarters with Deborah in silence. When they'd reached their rooms and the door was shut behind them, she'd turned to him and smiled sadly.

"Well, I must stink as badly as you do by now, as I can't smell either of us any more. So shall we kiss and make up?" Gideon had held his arms open and she'd flowed into them, kissing him deeply, then encouraging him to pull her dress down to expose her breasts and move his head to suck gently on her nipple. Moaning her pleasure, Deborah had slipped her hands up the jacket of his dress uniform and started to unzip and remove it. Within minutes, they were on the floor of the living room, with him on top and inside of her. Gideon had insisted that Deborah kept her stockings on, even as he'd removed every other item of clothing she wore. For the next hour, they'd both concentrated on making up for the night before, finally releasing themselves to a climax that seemed to go on forever.

They'd eventually moved to the bedroom and snuggled down into their large bed, entwined around each other, secure in the knowledge that Marcus was being looked after elsewhere and for once, there was no danger of interruption.

Deborah didn't respond to Gideon's request at once and when he looked down at her as she lay with her head on his shoulder, he could see that she was frowning in thought.

"It's hard to say, but something about our guests didn't feel right. They were doing their best to cover it, but they were on edge, almost..." she paused, searching for the right words, "almost afraid." She shook her head. "I know that's not very helpful. They could have been nervous about a whole number of things, but there was something not quite right." Deborah shrugged and smiled up at him. "Never mind. At least, they helped us get back together again."

Gideon grinned down at her and lifted his hand from where he'd been playing with her nipple, to run his thumb along her cheek. "How do you figure that?"

She grinned back, mischievously. "Because spending all that time with them made me smell as bad as you do! But Marcus is not going to be a happy bunny when he finds out that Mummy now stinks as badly as Daddy does."

Gideon smiled and lifted her face to his to kiss her, then spoke softly. "Marcus will have to put up with it. But as I can't smell you either, I'm going to take advantage..." he started to run his hand down her back, caressing her buttock and sliding his hand between her legs from behind.

Deborah chuckled softly, then moaned as his hand started to stroke her most sensitive parts. "You cad, taking advantage of a poor defenseless girl..."

He stopped all further words with a kiss.

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