

# *The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four R - Part 2: The Last Battle*

by *The Space Witches*



*Talia's fate is unsure.*

## *Epilogue*

27th April 2273

Gideon

*I was on the bridge, taking over from John, when the call came through from Marcus Cole. As we were in a particularly dull part of hyperspace at the time, it gave a welcome break from the monotony of fuel consumption reports, crew evaluations, maintenance logs and the other items that make up the daily grind of a Star-ship Captain. Not that I should really complain. John keeps most of that sort of crap off my desk and only leaves me the more interesting bits. Even so, a call from Marcus Cole provided a pleasant distraction.*

*Please note that I said a 'call'. A visit would have been something else altogether. That Ranger can create chaos wherever he goes. Heaven alone knows how his wife puts up with him.*

*Marcus wanted to speak to both me and John, so I asked Siddhartha to route the call through to the conference room, and John and I moved through there to make ourselves comfortable. I may have been on duty, but that didn't stop me putting my feet up on the conference room table.*

*It had been an interesting couple of months since the battle at Epsilon Delta 457. John and I had watched with interest as Earthforce went through a major restructure, which by a strange coincidence had resulted in most of the names on Lochley's list of suspects taking early retirement, or being moved to posts where they had no power or authority. There had been no publicity about the events leading up to the reorganization; it had just been sold to the public as an efficiency exercise. Well, it was hard to argue with that.*

*The end result was a leaner, fitter command structure, cleared of the bad influences and conflicting loyalties, which was good news for everyone in Earthforce, including those of us assigned to the ISA. So feeling good and relaxed, I sat back with my arms behind my head, and waited for whatever bomb shell Marcus was about to drop. His bearded, smiling face looked out at us from the viewscreen, and the*

*background we could see made it apparent that he was calling from the Ranger training center on Minbar. He started by saying, "Do you remember Talia Winters?"*

*I snorted a laugh. I was hardly likely to forget the woman who two months before had led a telepathic attack on my crew; an attack that would have succeeded had it not been for the mental blocking powers of John's wife, Lily, supported by her sisters. I looked across at John and saw a momentary flicker of pain cross his face. My First Officer had been involved in Talia's interrogation when she'd been captured, and it hadn't been a pleasant experience for him. Marcus' comment had obviously recalled painful memories.*

*What John had told me after that interrogation had led me to do a little digging. It was entirely possible that the Psi Corps had been involved in the destruction of my old ship, the Cerberus, and Talia Winters had been a senior liaison between Psi Corps and the Shadows after her original personality had been replaced. I'd wanted to know if the new Talia might have more information about which Shadow Hybrid ship had attacked the Cerberus. Specifically if it had been the ship built for the use of Psi Corps: the ship we'd destroyed two months before.*

*I'd asked Deleenn about Talia's history, and discovered that the original Talia had been 'replaced' in early October 2259, eight months after the destruction of the Cerberus. That date, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2259, was a date forever engraved in my memory. It's not as if anyone could forget the day they thought they were going to die of suffocation, stranded alone in space.*

*So it seemed the new Talia hasn't been involved in that event, as at the time she was still the old Talia, carrying out her duties as a commercial telepath on B5, oblivious to the fact that Psi Corps had planted another personality within her. How much the new Talia had subsequently learned of the events surrounding the murder of my friends and crewmates was something I'd been unable to discover. Perhaps Marcus had news on that front. So after my half-strangled laugh, I waved at Marcus to continue.*

*"I thought you might be interested to find out what happened to her." Marcus beamed at us.*

*Frankly, I didn't give a damn. The woman was trouble, and while I was sickened by what Psi Corps had done to her, I had no real interest in her. Before I could say anything, John intervened. "Yes. Has any progress been made in restoring her original personality? Was Chief Allen correct? Did Mr. Garibaldi have a copy of the Vicker's recording?"*

*I have to admit, I'd completely forgotten that part of the conversation with Zack Allen on Babylon 5. I'd been interested in getting an explanation for his odd behavior at the time, but once it was explained, I'd put the whole thing out of my head. John had obviously had more of an interest in Talia as a fellow telepath, and I knew he carried some guilt about the part he'd played in her interrogation. For John's sake, I hoped the news was positive.*

*Marcus' smiling face was a pretty good indicator, and he looked at John as he said, "Yes, Garibaldi still had the recording. He brought it to Minbar himself, bringing his wife and daughter on a visit to the Sheridans. Minbari telepaths spent weeks working with Talia, and I'm delighted to be able to report that they were finally able to wipe the new personality completely, and restore the original Talia. Of course, she doesn't remember anything that happened since late 2259. She says she has vague memories of distant dreams, but that's all. So she has a lot of catching up to do, but the original person is back."*

*Marcus' smile became a little wistful as he went on, "She and Susan had a rather emotional reunion. I hadn't realized how close they'd become in the last few weeks they'd known each other."*

*There was something just a little off in the way Marcus said that. Somehow, it sounded as if he wasn't that keen on the idea of his wife and Talia being close friends. I wondered why for a moment, then dismissed the impression as Marcus smiled again and continued, "Talia seemed a bit surprised to find that Susan and I were married, and frankly relieved that Garibaldi was now a husband and father, but it was nothing compared to her amazement that Sheridan and DeLenn were together. She was obviously shocked by how much we'd all changed and aged. For her it's bit like it was for me, but more so. Waking up to find that years have gone by can be a bit difficult to get to grips with, I can tell you. I've been working with her here, on Minbar, to help her, as I'm the one with the best idea of how she feels."*

*Marcus' face became a little more melancholy as he sighed and said, "At least I was asleep during all the time that passed, safe in my cozy little cryo-tube. Poor Talia has to deal with the fact that she was walking around, with another person in her head, controlling her body. She knows that she'd going to meet a lot of people who might have only known the other Talia, and she'll have to deal with their response to her."*

*I frowned, realizing that in many ways, Talia was now like someone who'd been mind-wiped for murder. The new Talia, who was actually the old Talia, would have no memory of the crimes she'd committed. I asked, "Wouldn't it be better to send her to a place where no one knows her? Like they do with mind-wiped people?"*

*Marcus shook his head. "It's not quite the same, Matthew. People who've been mind-wiped have memories of a different past implanted, consistent with their new calling, whatever that might be. Talia now has all her original memories back. She wants to pick up as much of her old life as she can, albeit thirteen years on. We can't refuse her that, cutting her off from the few things she has left that are familiar to her. That would make us as bad as the Psi Cops who programmed the new Talia. Or do I mean the old Talia? This does get rather confusing. It would have been much easier if the implanted personality had used a different name."*

*I laughed at Marcus' frustration, but I just about grasped what he was saying.*

*"So what happens now? Where will she go?" John was a damn sight more solicitous about Talia's future than I was.*

*"She's going to stay here on Minbar for a while at least, attached to the Earth Alliance embassy, doing her old job as a commercial telepath. DeLenn and Sheridan will keep an eye out for her, as will I when I'm here in Tuzanor, at Susan's request. Of course, Talia only knows me as Susan's husband, as we never met in her first life. I only arrived on B5 after she'd..." Marcus paused searching for a suitable word, then shrugged and said, "...after she'd left."*

*That odd expression of discomfort reappeared on Marcus' face, but it was instantly covered and he smiled. "Before I sign off, Talia would like to speak to you, if you're willing. She doesn't know either of you, of course, but she's been told about what happened out at Epsilon Delta 457, and she wants to apologize."*

*I started to say that it wasn't necessary, feeling more than a little uncomfortable with the idea of meeting this new, improved Talia, but Marcus gave one of his best puppy-dog smiles and interrupted me. "Please, Captain. She needs to do this. She may not remember who she was or what she did, but she does know that she committed some terrible crimes in her other persona. Can you let her apologize and give her the forgiveness she desperately needs? Please?"*

*I remained silent for a moment, very much aware that both John and Marcus were watching me closely. Allowing Talia to apologize was one thing. Forgiving her was quite another. She had been involved with the enemy that had destroyed the Cerberus and murdered my friends. She had committed appalling acts, had attacked my ship, and had DeLenn and the White Stars not arrived when they did, she could have led the destruction of the Excalibur, and the murder of my wife and son. Could I look this new Talia in the face and forgive her? Could I accept that this woman was not responsible for those crimes?*

*I'd never met a mind-wiped criminal, never had to deal with that issue before. When I'd reported to Sheridan after the battle at Epsilon Delta 457, he'd told me of an incident that had taken place on Babylon 5. Sheridan had allowed an order of monks to operate on the station, and one of these monks was a Brother Edward. The monk had been a kind and gentle man, an artist, who seemed to full of goodness. It had eventually come out that Brother Edward was a mind-wiped murderer, when the brother of one of his victims had come after him, murdering Edward in a brutal, violent way.*

*Brother Edward's murderer had himself then been mind-wiped, and he, too became a monk in his turn. Sheridan was introduced to this man, who he knew had tortured the gentle Brother Edward to death, and was forced to forgive him. Sheridan had shaken the hand of the murderer, trying to accept that the person who had killed Brother Edward was gone, and the man he could see was a new innocent.*

*That story made me realize yet again that Sheridan was a far better man than I. At the time, I'd wondered how Sheridan could have done that, and I still didn't know. Yet now I was faced with the same choice. Could I face the woman who had conspired to kill me, my family and my crew? The woman who had worked with the destroyers of the Cerberus? Could I forgive her?*

*Maybe one day, but not today.*

*I stood and shook my head as I said to Marcus, "I'm sorry, I can't do that yet. John can make his own choice, but it's too soon for me."*

*I walked out of the conference room, mulling it over in my mind as I returned to the bridge. I still don't know whether John agreed to speak with Talia as I never asked him, and he never mentioned it. Marcus never raised the subject again either.*

*As I sat in my chair, picking up the fuel consumption report where I'd dropped it, I had one final thought on the subject.*

*One day I would look for Talia, to see her and tell her all was forgiven. But before I could do that, the last Shadow Hybrid ship would have to be destroyed. Forgiveness would only be possible after that very last battle.*

*Forgiveness for myself, as well as for Talia.*

*{Chapter 1} {Chapter 2} {Epilogue}*

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## *The Witches of Eriadne: Interlude Four R*

*{Part 1: These Sheltering Arms} {Part 2: The Last Battle}*