

Eden – Prologue
by Angela Reese

Lorien Velar paused outside the interview room, trying to calm herself down. No good. Her first real news job, and she was about to interview Deeta Tarrant, Teal's longest running champion ever, not to mention the sexiest.

She opened the door to see him resting in a chair, his eyes closed. She hesitated, then slipped inside and closed the door.

Tarrant opened his eyes, and Lorien was drawn into their blue depths. He smiled at her. "I've died and gone to heaven."

Lorien turned bright red and looked hastily at her notepad. "I'm, er, Lorien Velar, with Teal Consolidated News," she stuttered out. "I have, er, we have an interview for...I mean, a meeting for an interview." She nearly sighed with relief at getting this out, and anxiously looked up at him.

Deeta was smiling. "This is your first interview, isn't it?" he asked gently, then frowned worriedly when Lorien's face crumpled and she looked miserable.

"Oh, no, was I that bad? Oh, I'm acting like a fool!" she moaned, slumping into a seat.

Deeta reached across the table and took her hand, giving her a reassuring smile. "Relax. You weren't that bad, really. It's just that when you've been interviewed as many times as I have, it's easy to tell who's experienced and who's not." He grinned at her encouragingly, and Lorien gave him a hesitant smile.

"Now then," Deeta went on, "let's see if I can't help you get started. I think I know all the basic questions. But first," he continued, standing up and pulling her with him, "we're going to go find a nice, quiet restaurant."

Lorien blinked and looked at him, surprised. "Restaurant? Why?"

"Because," he grinned, ushering her out the door, "I need to relax after that fight, and you need to relax before this interview." He led her down the hall, toward the back exit. "And on the way, I can think of some questions you should ask me. Like, what am I doing tomorrow night?"

The door clicked shut behind them.

Once clear of the system, Ann switched on *Defiant's* autopilot and looked over at Jenna. "So? Have you decided yet?"

Jenna sighed. "You'd think it'd be an easy choice," she said, staring at the viewscreen. "On the run on *Liberator*, with people I know and a fabulous ship; or just the two of us and *Defiant*, trading with people questionable loyalty." Jenna paused, toying with her teleport bracelet, as Ann waited patiently, then abruptly snapped it off her wrist and set it down.

"I'm not ready to go back to *Liberator*," she said decisively, "but I'm not ready to go back to smuggling, either." She grinned at Ann. "I guess I've gotten used to this rebellion stuff."

Ann grinned back. "So, where shall we go first?"

“Somewhere that’s outside the Federation,” Jenna mused. “Someplace with an active, successful rebel base, who can use a pair of excellent pilots and another ship...”

“Teal,” Ann interrupted. “I heard father discussing it just before the war. He was saying that it was a pity the Federation couldn’t go in and wipe out ‘those damn subversives’.”

Jenna was frowning thoughtfully. “Teal, Teal... I’m sure I know someone on that planet.”

“That could be useful. Someone in the rebellion?”

“No... It was four, maybe five years ago; I was on one of the smaller planets during a minor war – you know about the Teal/Vandor War Convention, don’t you?” Ann nodded. “Well, I was having a drink in a quiet little dive, when the current champion wandered in.” She smiled to herself. “He was really good-looking. Anyway, we were both sitting at the bar, and we got to talking – and other things.” Jenna smirked. “Deeta was very good at the ‘other things’.”

“Deeta?” Ann queried. “Deeta what? Would he still be around?”

“Last I heard, he was still First Champion. Let’s see; Deeta, Deeta... Tarrant! That was it, Deeta Tarrant. We’ll have to look him up.” She turned to program the coordinates, and noticed Ann’s astonished look. “What?”

“Tarrant?” Ann repeated, staring at her. “I, er, don’t suppose he mentioned a little brother, did he?”

It was Jenna’s turn to stare. “Yeah, his brother Del. Deeta bragged about him constantly. How did you know that?”

Ann grinned. “Del was in one of my classes at the academy. He was always talking about his big brother Deeta.”

“What?!” Jenna laughed.

“Small world, right?” Ann smirked. “I think it was the ‘really good looking’ bit that made the connection.”

Jenna finished programming the flight computer for Teal, still chuckling. “Well, I hope you remember a lot of stories – Deeta’s sure to make you recite all of them over and over.”

“If he looks anything like Del, I’ll be happy to recite anything he likes!”

Deeta met them at the spaceport with hugs and kisses, then introduced them to Lorien.

“Your wife, eh?” Jenna repeated, eyebrows raised. “Congratulations! Quite impressive, Lorien,” she added. “I didn’t think this one was the marrying kind.”

“The last time we met,” he grinned, “I wasn’t.” He led them toward their transport. “Aren’t you still with *Liberator*, Jenna?”

“Not just now – I’m looking for something a little...quieter. Know of anything?” she asked cautiously.

Deeta glanced at her, and grinned cheerfully. “Just so we don’t have to dance around questions all day – yes, Lorien and I work with the rebels here on Teal; and yes, we’d love to have a couple new pilots join us – even if it’s only temporary. In you get,” he added, ushering them into the flyer. “Enough business for now – Lorien has a dinner planned that defies description, and I don’t want thoughts of the Federation ruining my appetite.”

“Nothing ruins your appetite,” Lorien laughed, elbowing him. She turned to Ann. “Is this your first visit to Teal?”

“It’s my first visit to any planet outside the Federation – it’s very nice, not seeing troopers everywhere.” Ann grinned wryly. “If I hadn’t met Jenna, I’d’ve been stuck in the Federation ports on Earth now, and not visiting anywhere.”

“Ann graduated from the Federation Academy,” Jenna commented, seeing Deeta’s curious look. “And if I hadn’t met her, I’d be stuck on Earth as well – in prison.”

Ann reddened, then turned to Deeta and Lorien. “That reminds me. I met someone at the Academy who I believe you know.” Jenna snickered.

“Really? Who?” Lorien asked.

Ann grinned. “Oh, a hotshot named Del Tarrant.”

“What!” Deeta exclaimed, delighted. “You were at school with Del? When did you see him last? How is he? How was he in school?”

Lorien gave a mock groan. “Oh, here we go. It’ll be ‘Del this’ and ‘Del that’ all night.”

“Still his favorite subject, hmmm?” Jenna asked, smiling.

Lorien grinned. “To be honest, I was starting to think he was making it all up – no one’s little brother is that perfect.”

“Mine is,” Deeta informed them pompously, ruining the effect by winking at them.

“Well, all I can say,” Ann commented, eyeing Deeta, “is that he certainly inherited the family looks.”

After eight months working with the rebels on Teal, Jenna and Ann decided to move on.

“I think we’re ready for more action,” Jenna explained when they told Deeta. “I mean, regardless of how vital the supplies are, after awhile it’s still just another quiet supply run.”

Deeta smiled. “Well, I knew it wouldn’t last much longer,” he replied. “As it happens, I know of another group that’s looking for a good pilot or two – their leader contacted me yesterday to see if we could spare anyone.”

“Where are they based?” Ann asked.

“Deva’s establishing a base on Gauda Prime.”

“Gauda Prime?” Jenna exclaimed. “That’s got a new Federation station – there’re troops in and out constantly!”

Deeta shook his head. “Not for long, apparently. Deva wasn’t specific, but he said they’ve managed to gain control of the new Federation base without anyone noticing. The rebellion on Gauda Prime is being accommodated and financed by the Federation!”

“This Deva must have a hell of a lot of nerve, to pull that off,” Ann said admiringly.

Deeta pulled out a piece of paper. “He gave me contact instructions, in case I could send someone. His partner will be at this bar, on Sigma V, in two weeks. The location, date, and time are listed here.” He held it out to Jenna. “Will you go?”

Jenna reached to take it, then hesitated and looked at Ann. "What do you say, partner? Shall we go?"

Ann grinned and took the paper from Deeta. "We'll have to. You promised me excitement and adventure when we joined up, and I'm still waiting."

Deeta watched them go, and sighed. "You won't have to wait long, I'm afraid," he said quietly, then went to tell Lorien and the others.

Two weeks later, Ann was leaning on the bar in the Perverted Phoenix. Jenna was in their room upstairs; they had decided that only one of them should make the initial contact, and Jenna was more likely to be recognized. Ann gazed casually around the crowded bar and sipped at her drink, listening for the contact phrase.

"I'll have a Plasma Drive."

The voice caught her attention even before she recognized the words. The man was standing about halfway down the bar, apparently uninterested in anything other than his drink. She grinned to herself, then wandered over to him. //This'll be fun, she thought, sliding in beside him. //He's even better looking than his picture.//

"I have a cousin who drinks those all the time," she said when he glanced at her."

He raised an eyebrow. "Really? Perhaps I know him. What's his name?"

"Deeta."

"Ah, yes, the hero of Teal." He gave her a warm smile, relaxing slightly. "So, what has he been up to lately?"

Ann leaned closer and smiled slowly. "It's awfully noisy in here. Why don't we take a bottle of something and go upstairs to my room? We can catch up on stories there."

He blinked, startled, as she handed him her key and strolled over to the stairs. She looked back once, to see him taking a bottle from the bartender, then hurried up to the room.

Blake grinned, amused, as he headed for room 107. If this redhead was half as good at flying as she was at flirting, she was exactly who they needed.

He knocked on the door before unlocking it. "I hope you know what this is," he said, stepping in. "I asked for a bottle of whatever you'd been drinking."

Ann leaned over from her chair to take the bottle. "Thank you," she said, giving him a mischievous grin. "Now you just need to meet my partner, and we can sit down and talk business."

"Partner?" Blake asked, just as he heard the door close behind him. He whirled around, then stared.

Leaning against the wall, Jenna smiled at him. "Hello, Blake. It's been a long time."

Blake grinned, delighted. "Jenna!" He reached over to pull her into a bear hug.

Ann smiled. "I'll just go find some glasses," she said softly, wandering into the other room.

Much later, the three of them were lounging around the room, finishing off the bottle.

“So, Avon ended up with *Liberator* after all,” Jenna said, laughing. “I guess we should’ve gone there, Ann. You’d’ve liked Vila.”

“And Vila would certainly have complimented you on your taste in partners, Jenna,” Blake added, smiling. He drained his glass and leaned back against the wall. “So, you left Teal to get some adventure, eh? I want you to be certain – both of you,” he went on, suddenly serious. “It’s bloody dangerous, what Deva and I are trying to do.”

“And if it succeeds?” Ann prompted.

“If it succeeds, it could well be the beginning of the end for the Federation.”

“Then we’re in,” Ann stated. “Right, Jenna?”

“Of course. So, what is this great plan of yours, Blake?”

“He’ll have to tell us on the way,” Ann interrupted suddenly. She had been sitting on the windowsill, but jumped away from it hastily. “A squad of Federation troops just arrived, and I don’t think they’re here for drinks.”

“Damn!” Blake swore, getting up. “I was sure this place was safe.”

“Don’t panic yet,” Jenna said, grabbing her bag from the corner. “Do you have a ship here?”

“Huh? No, no – *Renegade* dropped me off on her supply run and won’t be back for two days.”

“Good. One ship’s easier. Is it clear, Ann?”

“All clear!”

“Great. Let’s go.” Jenna grinned at Blake’s mystified expression. “You’re forgetting what I used to do, Blake, and where we are. Quite a few of these places have hidden escape routes for those who may need them – just as long as you pay for the room in advance. Come on!”

With Ann bringing up the rear, Jenna led them through a crawl space that went sharply down, then leveled out for a while before coming up into an alley across the street and several yards from the bar. Keeping to the shadows and side streets, they managed to make it to *Defiant* without being spotted. Unfortunately, there were two guards between them and escape.

“Damn.” Jenna looked furious with herself. “I was recognized. I should’ve stayed on the ship.”

“And if it was the ship they recognized, you’d already be a prisoner, or dead,” Ann pointed out grimly. She carefully peered around the corner. “There’s only two of them. If I can distract them, can you take one out?”

Jenna nodded. “Be careful.”

Ann patted her on the shoulder and grinned. “Always.” She slipped away, moving toward the other side of the hangar.

Blake looked around anxiously, but other than themselves and the guards, the place seemed deserted. Then he heard a scream, and he whipped his head back.

Ann was staggering toward the Federation guards. One sleeve of her dress had been torn off, and the rest was slashed and tattered. Her long hair was mussed, and she was limping. “Oh, thank the stars,” she cried, gripping the senior trooper’s arm. “He attacked me! Over there, he tried to kill me!” she screamed, pointing away from Blake and Jenna. “Please, you have to protect me! Please!”

The troopers looked at the area she was pointing at for a moment, and Jenna and Blake dove toward them. The guard Ann had grabbed nearly got a shot off at Jenna, but

Ann jerked him off guard and flipped him. Blake had knocked the other one out and followed Jenna into the ship.

Ann ran after them. Just as she reached the airlock, the guard she had attacked managed to get off a shot that caught her in the leg. The blast threw her into the ship, and she barely managed to drag herself through the inner door and seal the airlock before she collapsed.

Blake found her a few moments later, dragging herself along the floor toward the flight deck. "What happened?" he gasped, horrified.

"I guess I didn't hit the guy hard enough," she muttered, then gasped in pain as he carefully picked her up. "Next time I'll know better."

"Let's hope there is no next time," Blake replied. They reached the medical unit and he placed her on the bed. "And if there is, you can think of a different distraction."

"Oh, yeah, that reminds me," Ann said. She grabbed his arm and fixed him with a determined, if weary, glare. "As your newest recruit, I have one requirement to joining your group."

"What's that?"

She grinned. "You owe me a new dress."

"You're what?" Deeta stared at his wife in shock. "But...but how?"

Lorien snickered and sat down in his lap. "Really, Deeta, if you're going to try and tell me you don't know where babies come from..."

"You know what I mean."

"Yes, I know," she replied, sobering slightly. "They do say that no method is foolproof; I guess we should've paid more attention." She sighed, and hugged him.

"You're not upset, then?"

"Upset?" Deeta exclaimed, startled. "Of course not. This is wonderful! Why would I be upset?"

"I don't know... I suppose I'm just concerned about raising children in the middle of a rebellion." She smiled up at him. "Probably just pregnancy jitters."

"Probably," Deeta replied. "Don't forget, we're outside the Federation. This is no doubt the safest rebel base in the galaxy. And," he went on, grinning at her, "I'll even tell you your birthday present now – as soon as young Jeffries is good enough to take my place, I'm resigning as First Champion."

"Oh, Deeta!" Lorien gasped, then kissed him. "That's wonderful!"

"Well, now that I have a family, I can't go gallivanting off whenever a politician gets into a snit." He kissed her again, and changed the subject. "So, did the doctor say whether it's a boy or a girl?"

Lorien smirked. "Oh, yes – they're both girls."

"Both..." Deeta's jaw dropped.

"That's right, you overachiever, you," she grinned, chucking him under the chin. "We're having twins."

Lorien stared at the screen, in shock.

She had not been monitoring this ‘war’, as she usually did – the doctors were still wary of the effect of the monitor patches on unborn children – but the sight on the viewscreen was more than sufficient.

Other members of the rebel cell, hastily removing their patches, hurried over to her to offer some support. Someone, she noticed absently, had the sense to turn off the screen.

Not that it mattered. The sight of Deeta’s body on the warehouse floor was etched deeply into her mind, no doubt permanently.

As she closed her eyes, still seeing his body falling, Lorien could hear someone screaming incoherently.

It was only later that she realized it had been her.

“Administrative assistant?” Ann repeated, amused. “I thought you needed pilots.”

“Well, yes,” Blake said, grinning sheepishly, “but unfortunately, we still need ships for the pilots to fly.”

“Aha! So, Jenna gets to fly *Defiant*,” Ann paused to glare at Jenna’s smug look, “and I get to... what?”

Deva grinned. “Basically, just hang around looking tough.”

Ann looked thoughtful. “Mmmm... Yeah, I think I can handle that.” Jenna snickered.

“Officially, you’ll be my assistant and bodyguard,” Deva continued. “You’ll also be my liaison with Roj, so we’re not seen together too often.”

It was Jenna’s turn to throw her partner a mock glare. “Just don’t get too carried away with those ‘liaisons’, Red.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry,” Ann smirked. “I’m waiting till I meet this Vila you keep talking about.”

“Can’t you keep our orbit stable, Jenna?!” Blake exclaimed, gripping the side of his console and losing track of the scan again. “I can’t get a clear scan for life signs!”

“Why not just try stabilizing the planet, then,” Jenna muttered through gritted teeth. “I find it awfully hard to believe that Avon would bring...them... Oh, gods.”

At Jenna’s sudden gasp, Blake forgot the computer scan and turned toward her, only to be thrown to the floor again. “What?”

Jenna was staring at the viewscreen, which displayed more of the small meteorites that had been knocking *Defiant* around.

They were parts of *Liberator*.

“It seems the rumors were correct, Roj,” she said quietly. “Avon was led here looking for you – and he never left.”

“We don’t know that they’re dead,” Blake said stubbornly. “They’d’ve teleported down if they had the chance. They may still be alive down there! If I can just get a clear

scan...” With that, he was back at the screen, desperately searching for any sign of life on the rapidly disintegrating planet below.

“There! Jenna, read in these co-ordinates and see if there’s any place you can land.”

“It’s possible...but not for more than a minute or two. Are you sure someone’s there?”

“Positive. At least one, possibly two people in what looks like the remains of a building. How close can you land?”

“There’s a stable area just next to the ruins; as long as they’re not buried, we should have enough time.” Jenna began descending cautiously into the atmosphere. “You can’t go alone. Alin,” she went on, hitting the intercom to the engine room, “meet Blake at the hatch. We have a survivor down there.”

“Roger.”

“All hands, brace for landing!” Blake sat down and gripped the railing, watching the ground approach. Finally, they touched down with a surprisingly gentle bump, and Blake leapt up and ran to the hatch. Jenna had already set it to open, and he and Alin ran toward the still-smoking ruins as fast as they could.

Spotting a body through the smoke, Blake scrambled over a half-crumbled wall and nearly fell onto her. Hastily lifting her onto his shoulder, Blake paused only long enough to be sure there was no one else there. Alin had gathered up someone else from the ruins, and no other survivors were in sight. As soon as they reached *Defiant*, Blake signaled Jenna to take off.

Once they were on course to Gauda Prime, Jenna set the warning systems and switched to autopilot, then headed to sickbay. “Blake,” she began, entering, “who did we find? Are they...” Jenna froze, staring over Blake’s shoulder at the battered, unconscious woman hooked up to the monitors. “Servalan,” she spat out. “We risked our lives and this ship to rescue Servalan!?”

Blake grabbed her shoulders as she started forward, and she saw his delighted smile. “Not just Servalan, Jenna,” he began, then paused as another voice weakly interrupted. Not exactly a voice, though...

Jenna...

“Cally,” she gasped. Whirling around, she saw the Auron lying on the other bed, and rushed over to her. “Cally!”

Hello, Jenna. Cally smiled wearily. *It is good to see you again.* She squeezed Jenna’s hand, then drifted off to sleep as the sedative patch took effect.

Jenna left *Defiant* on autopilot toward Gauda Prime, While they decided what to do about Servalan.

“Blake, look at this,” Jenna called, pulling a section of the computer logs onto the main viewscreen. “I had the computer track and log all of the debris around Terminal, so we could avoid it on the way out.”

“And...?”

“So, look at this piece here,” she said, pointing it out. “According to the computer, this was traveling in the opposite direction of the rest. It’s a ship, Roj.”

“What?” Blake stared at the display. “Why didn’t we see it before?”

“We were busy trying not to crash,” she replied dryly. “Besides, it was on the other side of the planet, and was only in orbit a short while before heading off in...this direction.” Jenna touched a control, and the other ship’s course sketched itself on the screen.

“Is it Federation?”

“Unlikely, since Servalan was left behind. Let’s see...description matches a Wanderer class planethopper, with some modifications to the drive. Distinctive ion trail. And look here,” she went on, following the course with a finger. “That’s not a normal course change here – that’s the ship going to autopilot and switching to a preset course. I’ve seen that in planethoppers before; it’s in case the pilot’s injured.”

“Injured...” Blake repeated, catching her idea, “...or unused to the ship.”

“Or both. Blake, that could be Avon and the others!”

“Or, it could be Servalan’s allies, and they may have given her up as dead. We can’t risk following them now.”

“You’re right; we need to take care of Cally and Servalan first. How?”

“I’ve been thinking of that. We can’t take Servalan to Gauda Prime, of course – it would put our entire operation at risk.”

“On the other hand, we need to get Cally back to base as soon as possible; she’s not going to make it with the equipment we have here.”

“I know.” Blake was silent for a long moment, thinking. “I suppose if we kept Servalan sedated, we could make it to Gauda Prime with Cally, then deliver Servalan to Avalon.”

“Do we have enough sedative patches for both of them?”

“If not, we can tie Servalan up and keep her in the hold.” Blake started toward sickbay. “See if you can increase our speed at all, Jenna. I’ll see how Cally’s doing.”

Space Commander Nevarra paced the bridge, pausing occasionally to check various control stations. Finally, he sat down in his command chair, drumming his fingers impatiently.

“Sir! I’m picking up the president’s signal!”

In an instant, Nevarra was at the man’s side, peering at the figures. “Do you have a location on her yet?”

“Almost... There. She seems to be on board another ship – not a Federation cruiser, though. We can intercept in...” The lieutenant paused while he plotted the courses. “In eight point four hours, sir. Shall I set course?”

“Do it. Maximum speed.”

“Aye, sir. Maximum speed. Engaging engines now.”

The cruiser shot through space toward *Defiant*.

Blake looked up from Cally’s monitors as Alin walked in. “Has it been that long?”

Alin grinned. “Afraid so. Anything new?”

Blake shook his head. “Cally’s stable for now; Servalan’s asleep; and the patches won’t need to be replaced for at least five hours.” Blake looked down at Cally again, then headed toward the door. “Good night.”

“Night,” Alin called after him, then settled down by Cally’s monitor and pulled out a thermos.

Servalan woke up slowly, regaining consciousness in time to overhear Alin’s arrival and Blake’s report. Vaguely realizing what had happened, she carefully lay still and kept her breathing regular, her mind racing. Blake?!? What was going on? The last she remembered, she had been running to get off the destructing *Liberator*, praying the teleport was working. And now...

She was on a ship in flight – she could feel the vibrations. Blake... Blake was actually alive, and not dust on Epheron. Fortunately, her hands didn’t seem to be as battered as the rest of her, so the transmitter in her fingernail should still be working. Now, if she could just get control of the ship...

She heard Alin stand up and move around the room, then heard the intercom beep from the far wall. “Alin, this is Jenna, respond please.”

“Alin here. What’s up?”

“We’re coming up on a slight meteor storm. It’s not too bad, but you’d better put restraints on Cally and Servalan so they don’t get hurt.”

“Sure. Let me know when we’re through.”

“Roger.”

Servalan nearly grinned at her luck, but managed to keep her expression still as she listened to Alin move toward them. He went to Cally first, then moved toward her.

While he had been working with Cally’s restraints, Servalan managed to grab a sedative patch from the box next to her bed. When Alin leaned over her to attach the restraints, she slapped it onto his forehead. Alin barely had time to look surprised before he slumped to the floor.

Servalan quickly got up and locked the door, then searched the room for potential weapons. After locating a hypo and loading it with a triple dose of the strongest sedative she could find, Servalan moved Cally’s bed closer to the intercom, then restrained Alin to the other bed and sat down between them to wait.

A few minutes later, the slight turbulence ended and Jenna’s voice came over the intercom. “Alin, we’re through the storm. Any problems?”

Servalan smirked as she activated the intercom. “I’m afraid Alin can’t speak to you right now. Will I do?”

She heard Jenna gasp and someone else, probably Blake, swear. She went on before they could respond. “I’m holding a hypo with enough sedative to kill both Cally and Alin before you could unlock the door, and I’ll use it if you give me any reason to. Now, here’s what I want you to do...”

“Commander, the signal is changing direction.”

Nevarra came over to his station. “How long till we can intercept now?”

“Commander,” another ensign interrupted, “we have an incoming signal from the ship we’re following!”

Nevarra raised an eyebrow in surprise, then moved back to his chair. “All right, put it through.”

“I have audio only,” the communications ensign said, opening the connection.

“This is Space Commander Nevarra. Identify yourself.”

“Nevarra, how sweet of you to come and meet me.”

In spite of the lack of a picture, Nevarra snapped to attention. “Madame President! We’ve been following your transmission; are you safe?”

“For now, yes. I want you to land on Demar and meet me there. If you’ve been monitoring my signal, you have the course. Set down as close to this ship as you can.”

“Of course, Madame President. Any other instructions?”

“Not at this time; I’ll contact you later.”

“Aye, Ma’am. Nevarra out.” He waited till the transmission was disconnected, then glanced around the bridge. “All right, men, you heard her. I want a course plotted to Demar, the planet’s coordinates, and our ETA. Hop to it!”

Cally woke up to see Servalan watching her.

“Good, you’re awake. We’re about to land on Demar. When we do, you are going to come with me to a Federation cruiser that will be landing nearby.”

“I will not help you,” Cally spat out weakly.

“You will have no choice,” Servalan retorted. She held up the hypo. “I will have this at your neck constantly. If you or anyone else tries something stupid, you’ll be dead before they finish trying it.” They felt *Defiant* land softly. “Here we are.”

Servalan went to the intercom. “I want to see no one between here and the exit. If I do, Cally dies. Is that clear?”

“Servalan, Cally can barely walk. Why not...”

“Save it, Blake,” Servalan interrupted. “Don’t bother offering yourself as a hostage. You’d sacrifice yourself to kill me, but you won’t sacrifice a friend. Now, I’m leaving here in one minute, so I suggest you clear the corridors.”

As Servalan unfastened Cally’s restraints, they heard the cruiser land outside. Servalan smiled. “Time to go.”

They moved slowly through the ship, the hypo pressed against Cally’s neck. Nevarra met them midway between the ships with several troopers.

“Madame President. I’m glad to see you’re all right.”

“Thank you, Nevarra. Have one of your troopers take this woman into custody; she is a wanted criminal.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Nevarra waved a trooper forward, who began escorting Cally toward the cruiser. “And the rest of the crew?”

“Also criminals. Take your men and assume control of this ship.”

“Of course.”

As Cally was being dragged along by Servalan, she closed her eyes and contacted the others. *Jenna, Blake, you must now allow *Defiant* to be boarded! Seal the hatch as soon as you can. Do not worry about me, I have a plan. Trust me!*

She was being taken on board the cruiser when she heard Servalan cursing, as Nevarra’s men tried to break through the hatch. Smiling slightly, she gathered what strength she had left and slammed her guard into a wall. Taking his gun, she painfully made her way deeper into the ship. She had once seen a layout for a Federation ship; now, if she could just remember where the engine room was...

Finding it at last, she locked the door after her and sank to the floor, exhausted. *Jenna, you must take off now. Blake, do not feel guilty for this. I have companions for my death now. Go now!*

Waiting until she heard *Defiant* taking off, Cally found the part of the engines she wanted and set the gun as high as it went. She smiled fiercely. *Goodbye, Servalan!*

Defiant was only a few hundred feet up when the cruiser exploded. Even though they were expecting it, Blake and Jenna went white with shock as they sped away from Demar.

“Servalan gave her no choice, Blake,” Jenna said, crying softly. “Cally preferred death to capture, especially since she was dying anyway.”

“I know.”

When they arrived back at the base, Blake closeted himself with Deva and his best programmer, leaving Jenna to announce what had happened. As soon as he emerged, several hours later, Jenna demanded to know what was going on.

Blake kept walking toward his quarters, looking tired. “We’re trying to contact Orac.”

“Orac?” Jenna repeated. “But surely Orac was destroyed with Liberator.”

Blake shook his head. “Cally told me that Vila managed to sneak him off after Servalan teleported up.” He grinned. “I’d like to hear how he managed that someday.”

“So would I,” she agreed, laughing.

“I’m sure the ship you picked up was Avon and the others,” Blake went on. “If I can just get a message through to Orac, perhaps Avon and I can both stop chasing shadows.”

“It will take awhile, though, I’d imagine?”

“Yes. We have to relay the signal several times, to avoid it being traced back here. It may not even reach Orac for another month.”

“So, we’ll just have to wait, then.”

Blake grinned. “I hate waiting.”

“I’ve noticed,” she replied dryly.

He laughed and put an arm around her. “Well, we’ll just have to keep busy, then, won’t we? I have some new ideas for those plans we were discussing the other day.”

“You mean for the Eden base? Has Deva found a viable planet?”

“He’s located five or six possibilities. I’d like to go check them out in a few days, after we get some rest.”

Jenna smiled at him. “This is really starting to seem possible. A central rebel control base, buried in a planet, families and all. Setting it up is going to be a lot of work.”

“Mmmm, yes. We’ll have to work on our testing procedures, too,” Blake added. “We can’t risk anyone slipping through the cracks and getting to Eden. I’ve already told Deva that I’ll be running all the tests.”

Jenna stopped and stared at him. “You’ll be what? Blake, that’s not a job for just one person. You can’t do it all on your own!”

“And I can’t trust it with anyone else.” He put his hand on her shoulders. “Jenna, I’m responsible for everyone on this base. I’m responsible for their safety. That makes me responsible for everyone who joins.”

“That does not mean that you have to spend your life out on the planet every day, risking death each time someone recognizes you. Or each time a real bounty hunter decides he doesn’t like competition.”

“Relax, Jenna. Just think how nice it’ll be to see Avon and Vila again, once we contact them.”

“Vila, maybe,” she replied, grinning, then sobered. “Oh, Blake, Ann mentioned that a technician we worked with on Teal has requested to join us here. I thought she could replace Jarol on *Nightwitch*.”

“Sure, if you two are vouching for here. Do I know her?”

“You may. It’s Lorien Velar; she was a reporter for Teal Consolidated News.”

“Velar...no, I guess I haven’t met her. Will you be picking her up?”

Jenna grinned. “I have an urgent appointment with my bed that should last quite awhile. Ann can take *Normandy* as soon as a route opens to Teal. She could use a trip off-planet.”

“No doubt.” They paused in front of Blake’s quarters. “Well, I have a similar appointment to yours,” he grinned. “See you for breakfast?”

“As usual.” Jenna kissed him on the cheek and continued down the hall. Ann had actually left for Teal a few hours ago, and Jenna was determined to get some sleep before they returned. She was also determined to find out why Lorien didn’t want anyone to know she had been married to Deeta Tarrant. “And it had better be good,” Jenna muttered, yawning, as she entered her room and dropped onto the bed. She was asleep in seconds.

To be continued...