

## Osiris

by Angela Reese and Virginia Milewski

“This is Osiris reporting in. Please acknowledge.”

“This is Ra. Go ahead.”

“I must report that the initial plan failed. I managed to manipulate the computer to choose a location best benefiting the Teal champion, Deeta; unfortunately, he failed to take advantage of it and was killed.”

“Servalan succeeded, then?”

“Not exactly. It seems Deeta’s brother was in the system for the war. He challenged and destroyed the Vinnie android before it was discovered. The war will be refought with new champions, but no other harm was done. Servalan will not gain control here.”

“Excellent. I look forward to your next report. Ra out.”

“Osiris out.”

Mulling over Osiris’ report, Carnell leaned back in his chair, smiling. “Ah, Servalan. Foiling your devious plans is so much more challenging than chess. And far more entertaining.”

Several months later...

Narisse sighed and drummed her fingers on the control board. It was a good thing she was being paid well for this job; boredom was expensive. She had been trailing Servalan through empty space for over a week now, and was beginning to wonder if there was any point to it.

On the other hand, anything that Servalan was keeping hidden way out here was something that could probably be used against her. And that was what Ra paid her for.

Finally, a small planet came into view on the long-range scanners. As soon as she was sure Servalan was landing, Narisse circled widely to the other side of the planet and waited for her to leave.

A few hours later, Servalan’s ship was headed back toward Federation territory, and Narisse switched on her detector shield and headed in. She picked up a stone castle on the way down, and landed about fifteen miles away. After camouflaging *Spirit*, she set off for the castle at a run.

Less than two hours later Narisse reached the castle. The door was not barred; she slipped in quietly and quickly explored the building. There was a mutoid on duty in a scanning room, which seemed to be equipped with only an extremely out-of-date detector. Another mutoid was stationed at a door in the cellar.

Frowning thoughtfully, Narisse slipped into a dark alcove and waited. She was determined to see what was behind the door, and the mutoid would have to move sooner or later.

Eventually, she heard the guard moving toward her. He went past without seeing her; as soon as he turned a corner, Narisse slipped into the cellar and tried the door. It was unlocked, and led to stairs going down.

Closing the door behind her, Narisse put on an infrared visor and carefully made her way down the stairs. There was a hall at the bottom, with several barred doors on

either side. Each door had a small, barred window in it, and she quietly peered into each one. The third cell was occupied.

Narisse stared at the sleeping man shackled to the wall for a long moment, then moved away as she heard the guard come down the stairs. She found another dark niche to stand in until he passed, then slipped quietly up the stairs and out of the castle.

Back at her ship, she thought rapidly about the implications of the prisoner's identity – and how well this would work against Servalan. Finally, Narisse send a coded, scrambled message to a relatively close rebel base, then thoroughly camouflaged her ship and headed back to the castle with some supplies. It would take at least a few days for anything to happen, so all she had to do was get back into the dungeon and make sure the man stayed alive just a little bit longer.

“It's a pity Lorien couldn't come along,” Jenna sighed. “They are her kids.”

“I know,” Blake replied, “but you know we couldn't wait for *Starlight* to get back; we may not have had a clear route then.”

“And we can't risk the Federation tracing rebels to Eden. Yes, yes, I know that, Blake.” Jenna grinned at him. “I should; I have to quote it at every new pilot coming in. It's still a pity, though.”

“We'll be back soon enough. Besides,” Blake added, smirking, “she needs the time on *Starlight* to get Tarrant used to being an uncle.”

Jenna laughed. “Somehow, I don't think ‘uncle’ is exactly the relationship they're hoping to work on right now. Better strap in, Blake; we'll be landing soon.”

After setting down, several members of the Teal rebel cell hurried over to greet them. “Welcome to Teal, Blake!” the leader said smiling, then turned to Jenna. “And it's about time you visited, Stannis! How's Ann? Did she come along?”

“Ann's fine, Jona,” Jenna replied, hugging the other woman. “She said to tell you all hello, but she couldn't get away. Any news lately?”

Jona frowned. “Actually, we did receive an intriguing message earlier today. I think you might be interested in it. Come on, I'll play it for you.”

In the communications room, Jona set up a tape and played it for them.

“This message was picked up from a relay satellite, with instructions to relay to all rebel bases. It reads: Prisoner of extreme importance being held on remote planet. Has been presumed dead for over a year. Extreme caution in attempting rescue. Urgent. Planet coordinates follow. Osiris. Message ends. Signal pattern verified. Gamma base out.”

“Signal pattern verified?” Jenna repeated. “What does that mean?”

“It's a trademark of Osiris,” Blake replied thoughtfully. “I've heard of him. He's an informant of sorts; very rarely leaks anything, but when he does, it's reliable. And important. He uses a signal pattern to code his messages, so no one else can use his name. Any ideas who this mysterious prisoner is?” he asked, turning to Jona.

“None at all,” she replied. “Of course, there are a lot of people who have been killed – or believed to have been killed – in the last year or so.”

“True.” Blake paused a moment, then looked at Jenna and grinned. “Well, what do you say to a quick rescue operation?”

“Sure. I always enjoy solving a mystery.” She turned to Jona. “Would you print out the coordinates for us?”

“Actually,” Jona said, handing her a sheet of paper, “I already have.” She grinned. “I was hoping you’d offer; *Defiant* is better equipped for this than anything we have here, and this is the closest base to these coordinates.”

Blake got up to leave. “We’ll start right away, then,” he decided. “If Osiris believes rescue is urgent, I don’t doubt he means it.”

Lorien leaned back in her chair after reading the printout, and sighed.

“Not bad news, I hope,” Tarrant commented from behind her.

She turned to see him leaning against the door to her room. “No, not really. Come on in.”

He walked over and leaned on the back of her chair. “That doesn’t sound very definite. Not good news, either, then?”

“Nosy, aren’t you?” she laughed, looking up at him. “It’s good news, in a way. The route cleared for Blake and Jenna to leave for Teal, to get Iliana and the twins. Unfortunately...”

“Unfortunately,” Tarrant continued, “you’re stuck here with me, and can’t go with them.”

“Unfortunate that I can’t go with them, yes,” she said, correcting him, “but not that I’m here with you.”

He grinned and straightened up, reaching for her hand. “Come on. I finally managed to straighten out the problem with the supplier, and everything should be delivered to *Starlight* in about two hours. I’m willing to get back late, but no way am I going to show up without every last item Avon wanted!”

Lorien laughed. “So, where are we going?”

“I figured that we could get something to eat, and you can spend the time telling me how to be the perfect uncle. I get to spoil them rotten, right? Buy them extravagant gifts, let them do anything they want...”

“Don’t you dare! Don’t worry, Del, they are going to love you as much...” she caught herself and stopped abruptly.

Tarrant looked down at her. “As much as their mother does?” he asked quietly, sounding hopeful.

She blushed. “I didn’t... I wasn’t... Oh, Del, I didn’t want to say anything, because, well...” she paused, looking up at him, then away. “I don’t want you to think... I don’t feel the way I do about you simply because you’re his brother. I don’t!” Lorien repeated, looking back at him.

Tarrant was smiling happily. “That’s good,” he said, taking her hands and pulling her closer, “because I don’t feel the way I do about you simply because my brother had good taste.”

“Oh, Del,” Lorien said, hugging him, “have you any idea how much I’ve been worrying over this?”

He grinned. “Oh, I think so. Hey, you’re shaking. What’s wrong? You’re not crying, are you?”

“No,” Lorien replied pulling back, “laughing. If you knew how many times Ann and Jenna have told me to sit down and talk to you...”

“It can’t be any more times than Vila and Blake told me to.”

“Not Avon?”

Tarrant laughed as they started walking again. “Avon would roll his eyes and tell them they were wasting their time, then get into the computer and schedule us on the same ships.”

“Avon?” Lorien repeated, astonished. “Matchmaking? I don’t believe it.”

“Blake caught him at it once. Avon claimed Vila talked him into scheduling him on all of Ann’s flights, but Blake got Jenna to check which crews had been changed.” He grinned. “I think Vila was still the one who gave him the idea, but they’ll never admit it.”

“We’ll have to reassure them all when we get back.”

“For now, though,” Tarrant declared, changing the subject, “I want to hear all about the twins. For starters, I don’t even know their names.”

Lorien grinned wickedly. “Oh, yes. Well, the older girl – by about half an hour – is Lora. The slowpoke is Della.”

Tarrant stopped and looked down at her, startled. “You’re joking. You didn’t…”

“We did.” Lorien smiled up at him. “Deeta and I chose the names right after I found out I was pregnant. He insisted that one be named after me, and we decided his wonderful little brother was the obvious choice for the second. And now that I’ve met ‘little brother,’ I think it was a perfect choice.” She pulled him along. “Come on, I’m hungry.”

“Not only do I have two nieces, one of them is named after me.” Tarrant shook his head, dazed. “I think I need more time to prepare for this meeting.”

“Don’t be silly, you’ll be fine. I’ll tell you everything you need to know,” Lorien assured him. “Anyway, they’re only ten months old. Give them a hug and a kiss and lots of attention, and they’ll adore you.”

“Hmmm, interesting technique,” he said, grinning at her. “Think it would work on their mother?”

She pretended to consider it. “Gee, I don’t know. When we get back to the ship, you’ll have to try it.”

“In that case,” Tarrant replied, ushering her to a seat, “we’d better eat quick.”

Narisse had quietly ensconced herself in a cell a few doors down from the prisoner. She had sent the message over a week ago, and expected a rescue ship at any time. The guard had brought food to the prisoner at irregular intervals; obviously a tactic of Servalan’s to keep him off balance.

In the middle of the night, Narisse woke suddenly. Something was wrong. She listened carefully, but aside from the guard’s footsteps as he brought the food, she couldn’t tell what would have wakened her. Frowning, she lay back down and listened as the guard walked into the man’s cell.

Then she jumped up abruptly. The footprints! Both mutoids had come down! Cursing herself for several kinds of an idiot, Narisse quietly sped down the hall to the prisoner’s cell.

As she glanced through the window, one mutoid was preparing to shoot the prisoner, who was staring at them hopelessly. The door was unlatched; Narisse kicked it inward, into the guard about the fire, then knifed the other’s plasma cavity as he was turning. She quickly did the same to the first mutoid before he could recover, then turned to release the prisoner from his shackles.

He stared at her in astonishment. “Who are you?” he croaked weakly.

Narisse introduced herself, quickly improvising. “My ship crashed a few miles from here yesterday. “I’ve been walking ever since, looking for some kind of native life, when I came upon this castle here. When I saw mutoids, I hid, but I overheard one tell the other it was time to kill the prisoner, so I followed to see what I could do.”

“I was told that I would be killed if any ship approached this planet,” the man replied, collapsing to the floor. “They must not have seen yours, or I’d be dead already. Someone else must’ve just arrived.”

Narisse grinned, sitting next to him. “Popular planet today.”

At that moment, they heard the cellar door open, and a faint voice. “Over here, I found the dungeons!” Narisse frowned, but waited with the man. Hopefully, no one would connect her presence with Osiris; at least until after she was gone. Actually, she told herself sternly, if she’d been doing a better job, she would’ve intercepted the guards outside the cell and not been seen at all. Some assassin I am, she scolded herself. I am really getting out of practice.

Footsteps were coming closer down the hall. The first to reach their open door was a large man; Narisse immediately recognized him as Roj Blake, from Ra’s files. The other person was a woman – Jenna Stannis, Blake’s best pilot. She was staring into the room with a shocked look; for a moment, Narisse was afraid her cover had been blown, until she realized Jenna was staring at the man beside her.

He grinned. “Hello, Jenna,” he said weakly.

“Oh, gods,” she whispered, still staring at him. “Deeta.”

After convincing Blake and Jenna that she didn’t need any help packing, Narisse jogged back to her shop to collect her few belongings. It was irritating that her story about crashing was now forcing her to leave with Blake; on the other hand, if she worked it right, she could stick around long enough to make sure Deeta’s resurrection was handled properly. And, she admitted to herself, it was obviously time for some kind of a break. It had been stupid not to take out the mutoids before; sabotaging their plasma supply would’ve been...but no, then Deeta would have starved waiting for rescue. Narisse sighed. No choice but to go through with the charade for now, and see how it worked out. She could always make her farewells at the first major port they reached, and find a ride back to collect her ship.

Then again, she mused, as *Spirit* came into view, it might be a good idea to hang around with Blake’s group for a while, if they let her in. And she had just saved Deeta’s life; that ought to get her somewhere. The rescuers had been shocked to discover that Servalan had survived being dumped in that lifepod; they really needed someone around who would’ve thought to check for a transmitter. Perhaps it was time for Osiris to let out the information that Servalan kept a transmitter implanted under a fingernail?

Ah, but then she’d just implant it somewhere else, Narisse’s logical side pointed out, and she’d start looking for spies. No, it can’t go out from Osiris, she decided as she packed. But maybe something more vague, in a rumor...

It was well past time for some kind of report; Carnell would be getting antsy. Narisse shielded the signal as best she could and hoped everyone on *Defiant* was busy with Deeta and not watching for communications traffic. She plotted the relay course, then set it to code and scramble. “This is Osiris, reporting. Ra, please acknowledge.”

The delay from this far out was quite long; Nariisse took the opportunity to add to the ship's camouflage. Finally, the response came in. "Osiris, this is Ra. Proceed with your report."

Nariisse waited until her computer verified his voiceprint before continuing. "Deeta Tarrant of Teal has been discovered alive, held prisoner by Servalan; her reasons for doing this are as yet unknown. Tarrant has been rescued by Roj Blake and Jenna Stannis; unfortunately, circumstances forced me to reveal my presence. My cover is secure; however, I plan to spend some time with Blake's group if possible. Tarrant's supposed death and imprisonment has great potential if used well; I intend to make sure that it is. Report ends."

The delay seemed shorter this time, as Nariisse ran through some combat exercises. "Acknowledged. Good luck with Blake and Tarrant. Is there any news you would like leaked out? Over."

Nariisse grinned. Just enough to get people thinking... "Affirmative. Circulate a rumor that Servalan keeps a homing transmitter implanted on her body. No location given. I will contact you again when I can. Osiris out."

Disconnecting the comm board, Nariisse removed a small section and stashed it in her pack. The converter was designed to be compatible with all known communications systems, to allow her to stay in contact with Carnell away from her ship. It would also supply Osiris' verifying signal if she needed to leak any information herself. Quickly shutting down all the ship's systems and sealing the hatch, Nariisse shouldered her pack and headed back to *Defiant* before anyone came looking for her – and a supposedly wrecked ship.