

# Hidden Facets: How the Libera- tor really works.

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A Space City birthday part story. The theme for the party was "Hidden Facets". This qualifies, I think.

**Featured fandoms:** Blake's 7

**Featured pairings:**

**A.S.S Story codes:** gen

**Story rating:** PG-13

"Cally?"

"Yes, Avon?"

"Why is there a small bowl of milk hidden behind Zen's repair access panel?"

Cally hesitated for a moment or two. "Oh, Vila must've put it there."

Avon looked doubtful. "Why would he do that?"

"Maybe he thought it was Adrenaline and Soma."

She got a disgusted snort for a reply. "I don't care what he thought it was, remove it will you?"

Another hesitation. "Are you sure that's a good idea? Maybe it's there for a reason."

He sat up and looked at her. "What good reason could there possibly be for putting milk inside Zen?"

Cally looked slightly uncomfortable. "None, of course. I'll take it away for you."

Avon looked at her as she left with the bowl, puzzled. Then he shrugged and went back to work. He'd soon have that minor fault fixed.

As he walked through the teleport bay on his way back to his quarters later that night, Avon saw a plate of cookies sitting on the floor near the console desk. After he'd stared at it long enough to convince himself it really was there, he stepped up to the console and pressed the intercom button.

"Jenna here," came the reply.

"Why is there a plate of cookies in the teleport bay?" he asked. There was a silence before Jenna answered.

"Oh, that's mine," she said. "I forgot to take it away. Just leave it and I'll take care of it later."

"No, I'll take it myself. No need for you to run all the way here."

"But... Well, OK. Thanks."

He studied the cookies carefully before he threw them away. It looked like something had been nibbling at them. It wouldn't surprise him if his crewmates' unhygienic habits had got them vermin aboard.

He had nightmares of freezing to death, and when he woke he found that he almost were. The temperature in his cabin was well below freezing, and icicles had formed along the rim of the ventilation grille. He stumbled out of bed like a geriatric baboon, tightly wrapped in his blanket. Somehow, he managed to punch the button on the intercom.

"Blake here," came the reply.

"W-w-what's wrong?" he stuttered.

"Nothing, as far as I know," Blake said. "Should something be?"

"F-f-fr-freezing."

"I'll send someone down."

As he sat warming himself in the galley he heard voices outside.

"...took the milk and then the cookies," Jenna's voice whispered.

"No wonder autorepair got mad, then," Gan whispered in reply. "I'll take a jar of honey and try to get him into a better mood." At first he thought that he must have misheard. That he was still confused from hypothermia. But then Gan entered and got a honeyjar from the cupboard.

"Feeling better yet?" Gan asked.

"Yes. What are you going to do with that honey?" Avon retorted. He could almost see the wheels turn in the bigger man's head as he tried to come up with an excuse.

"Ah, it's Cally who wants it," Gan said. "I think she's going to show Jenna some Auron massage techniques."

Avon just barely managed not to spew his tea all over the table.

"It sounds interesting," Gan went on. "I think I'll ask if I can join them."

Before Avon had recovered enough to say anything, Gan had left the room. He remained where he was for a while, trying to make some sense out of what was happening. Having failed, he finished his hot chocolate and went up to the flight deck.

Out of general suspicion, he made sure to walk very silently as he approached the door to the flight deck. And not in vain, it turned out. As he stood just out of view from the flight consoles, he could hear Cally's and Vila's voices.

"He didn't know it was yours," Vila said.

"You can't blame him for that," Cally continued. "He's an Alpha, he doesn't know how things really work. Please forgive him."

There was a strange little mumbling.

"Oh, come on, don't sulk!" Vila said. "I'll get you a whole bottle of Soma if you stop bothering him."

"It won't help anyway," Cally added. "He doesn't know it's you."

Avon couldn't take it any more. He walked through the door. Vila and Cally stood next to each other turned towards the panels beneath Zen's visual focus. He turned to see what they were looking at, but there was nothing, just a not quite closed access panel moving in the draft from the ventilation system.

"Who were you talking to?" he asked. The other two looked at each other.

"Nobody," Vila said. Avon gave him his most scornful look.

"We were rehearsing a play," Cally tried.

"So we Alphas don't know how things work, do we?" he said.

"Well, you don't," Vila let slip.

"So how *do* things work, then?"

"It's a secret..."

"Which you could tell to an alien, but not me?"

"I already knew," Cally said. "Everyone knows but Earth Alphas."

"Who were you talking to?!" Avon nearly shouted.

"Oh, all right then! We were talking to the autorepair gnome, trying to make him stop bothering you," Vila said. Avon looked at him. "And I suppose you expect me to believe that?"

"It's true," Cally said. "All technology is actually operated by fairies."

"Gnome? As in small creatures in children's stories?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I've recovered from the hypothermia yet, I thought I heard you agree to that."

"I did."

"Ah. Well. I'm going back to my cabin to get some sleep."

He had nightmares of walking through a hot and steamy rainforest, weak from overheating and thirst, and when he woke he found his cabin had been turned into a sauna. Steam filled it so that he couldn't see across the room, and everything was dripping wet. He stumbled over to the door, and found it wouldn't open. For a moment he considered calling for help again, but that would just give Vila and the rest the satisfaction of knowing that their little joke had worked. Instead, he crawled over to the desk to get at his tools.

Half an hour later the cabin's atmosphere was back to normal and Avon was very confused. He had taken the climate control circuits apart, and it did look like the autorepair circuitry had run amok. There was no way that Vila, Cally or any of the others could possibly have done it. And as if that wasn't enough, there was the tiny handprint inside the cover to the unit. He sighed. There was no point in staring at it any longer. He might as well admit to himself that he didn't understand what was going on and put the controller back. He got up and reached over to open the access panel to the climate system.

...and suddenly found himself sitting on the floor on the other side of the cabin with a pretty bad electricity burn on his hand. The air smelled of ozone, and the back of his head felt like he had hit the wall pretty hard. He got up and walked back to the access panel on shaky legs. When he'd opened it, carefully using an insulated screwdriver, he could see the high-voltage wire that had somehow lost a bit of its insulation and come into contact with the panel. It couldn't possibly have occurred by itself, and it couldn't possibly have been done by anyone of the normal crew. He'd certainly have seen them if they'd tried to sneak through his cabin while he was sitting in it. Maybe Vila and Cally had been telling the truth after all.

Feeling extremely silly, he kneeled in front of Zen's open access panel. He carefully put a bowl of milk and a plate of cookies inside. An opened bar of best-quality chocolate from the planet Valrhona went inside as well, followed by a bottle of Soma.

"I don't know if you can hear me, but I apologise for taking away your milk and cookies," he said in an embarrassed half-whisper. "Could you let my cabin be now, please?"

He waited a while for a response that never came, then he closed the panel and returned to his cabin.

The door didn't shock him. The climate system neither froze nor boiled him. There were no toxic substances in the water, nor traps in the bed. He sighed a deep sigh of relief and lay down on the bed. The normalcy of it all was like balm for his ragged nerves. He was just about to slip gently into sleep when he heard laughing voices in the corridor outside. One voice was Vila's. He knew that one well. The other one was a woman, and it wasn't Jenna or Cally. He knew their voices well also. This was a deeper, more musical voice. Quickly, he got up, opened the door and stuck his head out. In the corridor outside he saw Vila holding a tall, raven-haired, curvy woman in a decidedly non-chaste fashion. He pointedly cleared his throat.

"Who's your friend, Vila?" he asked. Vila disentangled himself sufficiently to talk.

"Ah, Avon. Avon, meet Battle Computer Number Three. Three, you already know Avon."

"Nice to meet you, after all this time," Battle Computer Number Three said. Avon was stunned.

"We thought that since you figured out about how things really work, we don't have to hide from you any more," Vila explained. He grabbed Avon by the arm. "Come, let's go see Logic Unit One. She's had the hots for you ever since you first came aboard."

And since Avon was far too shocked to resist, they all walked away down the corridor, hand in hand.