

Combat Rescue

Heroes Lost, part 2

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Featured fandoms: Babylon 5, Blake's 7

Featured pairings:

A.S.S Story codes: gen

Story rating:

Night had fallen over the Liberator. Three had come aboard from the strange ship, and were now sleeping in a few of the unused rooms along the starboard corridor. Orac had, after a suitable amount of complaining and time, located the foreigners' missing crewmate, and as Avon had feared she seemed to be in Space Command under Servalan's personal supervision. So now they were on their way there, standard by four and towing the White Star. All sleeping, except Avon, who sat on the flight deck trying "to figure out a way to avoid certain suicide", his words.

Cally dreamt of a place she knew not where. It was a house, but not like anything she'd ever seen. It looked strange and primitive, with many things built out of wood. She was a child walking through empty rooms, looking for something but afraid to find it. Door after door, with well-known rooms she'd never seen before behind them. The child knew she'd find what she was looking for behind the last door upstairs, but dread made her look carefully behind each one on her way there.

A woman was sitting in an armchair in the last, the terrible, room. Through the eyes of the child she was beautiful, huge, she was She Who Can Mend All Wrongs, she was Mother.

"Mama?", the girl half-whispered. "Mama? I hurt my finger."

There was no response. Mother just stared vacantly ahead, not reacting, not responding. Not comforting, not healing a hurt finger. The child gingerly walked up to the armchair, grabbed at Mother's arm and pulled it, trying to get a response. Harder and harder she pulled, desperation lending her strength. She screamed, hurt finger forgotten. She hated seeing Mother like this, she hated the grey-clad man with his injections, she wanted her mother back, now.

Cally felt her viewpoint shift. She was sitting in the armchair, and Susotchka was pulling her arm.

"Hush, dear, don't yell, you'll wake the whole house up," she said as she bent down and lifted the girl into her lap. "Tell mama what's wrong."

The child threw her arms around her neck, hugging her like she'd vanish if she didn't hold on hard enough.

"You woke up, mama, you woke up," she whispered.

"Yes, dear, I did," Cally said, not quite understanding.

"You woke up...", she heard, and the dream dissolved into wakefulness.

"Naturally, trying to raid Space Command is insane. But since sanity never was our strong point, we will attempt it anyway. And I think I know of a way to do it." Avon was sitting on the flight deck lounge, clearly enjoying being the center of attention. "Normally, we wouldn't stand a chance. The Federation's early warning patrols would see us, and we'd be shot to pieces before we got anywhere near Space Command. But if we use the White Star's jump engine, we ought to be able to appear *between* the patrols and Space Command. After that, they shouldn't fire on us, for fear of hitting the station." He smiled. "Fortunately, Servalan is very careful when it comes to her personal safety."

"That's the *best* way of doing it?", Vila protested. "I'm not going."

"Of course you are," Blake said. "We all are. It seems to be a workable plan, Avon. How close to the station can we jump?"

The discussion turned to details. Sheridan did his best to teach Blake, Jenna and Avon the capabilities of the White Star. Cally stopped paying attention.

"You look happy today," she heard the bearded one, Marcus, say behind her back. She was just about to turn around and answer when the foreign woman, Ivanova, did so.

"I slept well."

"You never sleep well," he said, voice full of disbelief.

"Well, tonight I did."

"Travelling must agree with you."

They fell silent, and Cally turned her attention back to the others.

"So it's agreed, then," Blake said. "We teleport in to the central corridor of the station. I, Captain Sheridan and Marcus go counterclockwise, Avon, Cally, and Commander Ivanova go clockwise, Jenna stays at the helm of the Liberator, Vila mans the teleport and Lennier controls the White Star. As soon as we find Deleenn, we all teleport out and leave as fast as we can. If we don't find her, we teleport out as soon as we meet at the far point of the station torus." There were nods and consenting grunts. "Right! Let's get ready for action."

Deleenn sat on the bunk in her cell. By pulling the slashed arms of her robe over her shoulders and tying them together behind her neck, she'd gotten it to stay up, but she felt half-naked with her arms bare. And she still felt dirty and powerless. She shivered and felt tears welling up again. With an effort of will bolstered by decades of practice, she slid into the calmness of memory trance.

The White Star dove out of the blue vortex, closely followed by the Liberator. Both ships decelerated hard, passed under the rotating torus that was Space Command and came to rest only meters away from its outer bulkhead.

She remembered walking beside Draal through a base the humans had managed to destroy. They'd used stealth and trickery, tactics the intensely honorable minbari warriors had some difficulty dealing with.

"What do you see?", Draal had asked her as they walked between lines of warrior corpses.

"Death," she'd answered.

"How do you feel?", he went on.

"Sad. Powerless. Paralyzed."

"Wrong!"

"I do not understand."

"Those feelings bring weakness. As one of the Grey Council, you must not be weak. Therefore, you do not feel those emotions. You, Satai Deleenn, will take those feelings and turn them into hatred and lust for vengeance. You will take your hatred, and you will take your thirst for revenge, and you will use them as a firebrand, leading your people through war to victory. *That* is what you feel, Satai."

"I understand," she'd whispered, and she'd done as he said.

Cally ran along the corridor, Avon and Ivanova close behind. They were looking for the prison compound, and wanted to get as far as possible before the Federation troops got organised and came after them. So far, no more than a couple of minutes had passed since their spaceships had emerged into normal space, and Space Com-

mand hadn't had time to react. It seemed that once you got in, security was fairly slow here. No great wonder, considering the amount of external defenses. Normally, they would've had plenty of time to react. The three ran on.

"Supreme Commander, the station has been invaded."

The voice woke her, and at first the meaning of what it said didn't quite reach her.

"What station has been invaded?"

"This one, Supreme Commander. It's Blake, madam."

"What?! Blake? *Here*?" She rose, not bothering to cover herself. The trooper at the door tried not to look at her and to pay attention to her at the same time, with no great success. She could see him nervously glancing at the wall-mounted manacles at the head of her bed.

"Yes, madam," he said. "Blake's people are accompanied by a group we've not seen before. They arrived out of some kind of hole in space, placed their ships very near the station and teleported in."

Hole in space. That matched how the alien woman had described their way of travelling faster than light. It seemed she'd been right when she'd said that her friends would come to pick her up. And of course, the Universe being such as it was, they'd teamed up with Blake. She wasn't certain if that was good or bad, but it most certainly was interesting.

"Go wake up Space Commander Ger for me, soldier. Tell him to meet me in the prisoner section at once."

"Yes, madam," the trooper said and left, obviously relieved to get out of her presence. She smiled and turned to her wardrobe.

"Do you know the layout of this place?", Sheridan asked, slightly out of breath.

"Can't be that different from other Federation bases," Blake replied.

"So where should the prison area be?"

"Near the outer wall, I think."

"Why there?"

"So it'll be the first thing to go if the station is attacked," Marcus answered before Blake had the chance.

"Right," Blake said.

"Nice guys," Sheridan observed.

Blake was about to say something, but was interrupted by the sound of running steps from ahead of them. "In here!", he spit out, gesturing to the nearest door.

"Sometimes you have to fight."

Vathenn's face had been grim. Delenn had never become quite sure if that was because she really found the subject repulsive, or if it just was to impress its graviness on the students.

"When such a time comes, you must fight effectively. The warrior caste cares about honor and such things, but you do not. When you have to fight, you care about one thing exclusively: winning. Forget honor. Forget mercy. Forget propriety. It's improper for a member of the religious caste to fight at all, so you have nothing further to lose by fighting dirty."

Vathenn paused, looked out over the class to make sure that everyone was paying attention.

"When you fight, you do not aim to kill. Killing is unnecessary. You aim to *incapacitate*. You fight because your opponent is about to take an unacceptable action, and your goal is to stop that action. Killing is not necessary to achieve that. Killing swiftly is the honorable way to fight, but you do not fight honorably. You fight to *win*, and nothing else."

"Yes, this is it," Avon said. He stood bowed over a computer terminal, and had just managed to call up a floorplan of the vicinity. They stood in a guardroom, their attention called to it by the presence of two now-deceased troopers. From outside, the sounds of approaching soldiers became stronger by the second.

"You two cover the way we came," he continued after a short while. "I'll find the cell she's in and bring her out, but I need some time to work." Without a word, Cally and Ivanova turned and left the room.

Tight pants, white. High-neck coat buttoned diagonally in front, also white. Knee-high boots with not-so-high heels. White, of course. Fully loaded variable-force blaster. Black, unfortunately.

The comm terminal called for attention.

"Yes?", she asked. The face of a young but rising fast officer in station security became visible on the screen.

"Supreme Commander, I would like permission to try to board the Liberator."

"Why do you bring this to me?"

"Station Commander Dorse did not feel that he had the authority to make such a decision."

In other words, he's too cowardly to take a risk, Servalan thought. And you, my boy, are too devious to say so.

"Permission granted," she said. "Mine the hull before you enter."

"Yes, Supreme Commander. Thank you, Supreme Commander." The screen returned to black. Servalan left the office, hurrying towards the back entrance to the prisoner compound.

Sheridan looked round the corner, fired a couple of shots in the general direction of the black-helmeted soldiers and quickly dodged back into cover. Marcus looked worried.

"Is this doing any good?", Sheridan asked.

"Yes," Blake answered. "If nothing else, it ties up a few troopers who can't harass Avon and the girls."

"Well, that's something I guess."

Memories passed through Delenn's mind. She walked with her father under the crystal towers of a temple on Minbar, sunlight coming from all directions at once. She stood before the Grey Council, Dukhat asking her what she thought should be done about this new species they'd heard of. She stood in the Grey Council, watching human fighter spacecraft be destroyed by the hundreds. She sat down in her quarters on Babylon 5, feeling the Chrysalis Machine starting to weave its cocoon around her, Lennier worriedly watching. The middle of the Grey Council again, the looks on their faces as she broke the leader's staff. The feeling of short, curly hair against her face, smooth folds of flesh under her tongue, a strange pressure and sudden pain in her vagina.

She woke up from the trance with a yell. The cell was still empty, still closed. She rose from the bunk and begun pacing back and forth.

Ivanova aimed through one of the holes in the hastily thrown-together barricade they'd built in the corridor. Several troopers lay still at the mouth of the corridor, shot by one or both of them. Cally'd shot out the lights above them, to make it harder for the troopers to aim, and so far it had worked quite well. At the moment, their enemies seemed to be thinking things over, for they hadn't been fired upon for several minutes now.

"I'll go back and see how it's coming along for Avon," Cally said and ran crouching down the corridor.

When she got to the guardroom he wasn't there. The monitor he'd been working with showed a picture of a woman with dark, long hair and the text "Unidentified female - cell 23: unlocked". As she watched, the text changed from "unlocked" to "open". Good, she thought, the sooner we can get out of here the better. She started back up the corridor, and was well in sight of the barricade when several ceiling tiles disappeared behind Ivanova's position. Two troopers started lowering themselves, silently. Cally's mind instinctively shouted out a warning, an image of the troopers coming down. Almost at the same time she realised that it wouldn't work, that the young officer's mind was too insensitive to receive her image. She started to yell but knew in her heart that it was too late, invaluable tenths of seconds had been lost. With rising panic she looked at what she knew would be the death of yet another comrade-in-arms.

Only it wasn't. The black-uniformed woman spun around, aiming high and firing before she could possibly have seen what was happening, firing again and again and again. Three dead soldiers hit the ground at her feet. Cally looked on in stunned disbelief.

Telepath, she thought. You heard me. You're a telepath.

Jenna saw the small group come out of the station's airlock, dragging equipment behind them. Their purpose was fairly obvious, but there wasn't much she could do about it. She placed her hands on the attitude controls. With a bit of luck, she could wait until they set foot on the hull, and then throw them off by suddenly spinning the ship. Vila wouldn't like it a bit, but he'd just have to take it. She hoped the smaller ship was able to take care of itself.

The bracelet on Blake's arm clanged. "Yes?", he said.

"Cally says that they've found this woman we're looking for, that Avon's fetching her right now and that they should be ready to get out of there in a couple of minutes. Do you want me to teleport your bunch out now?"

Splinters rained down on Blake and Sheridan as the soldiers outside the door tried to shoot it open. Marcus stood with his fighting pike ready. A few more shots and they'd be in.

"Yes!", all three of them shouted.

A faint click from the door. Sounded like the lock. Someone was coming. She placed herself to the side of the door, in the most suitable spot for attacking whoever entered. Nothing happened for a minute or several, time she used for biofeedback exercises she'd learnt back on Minbar. Her blood hyperoxygenated to feed needs much

larger than normal, large amounts of adrenaline tricked her muscles into overdrive, endorphines rushed out to block the pain of exertion far beyond what was good for the body.

The door opened. She looked, and saw the face of the man who had raped her. Fury exploded in her brain, obliterating what few inhibitions she might have had. Locking her elbow, she brought all the power her legs could provide to bear and rammed into him, arm stretched out to make an as-solid-as-possible pillar of bone from the heel of her hand down to her pelvis. Her hand smashed into the center of his chest. She felt it buckle inwards, heard bone crack as her own lower arm broke under the strain, saw the man's surprised expression as he flew across the corridor and hit his head on the steel wall with a sick thud. Still seeing the world in slow motion, Delenn turned and ran down the corridor. She tried to remember the way they'd used when they brought her here.

Ivanova heard steps behind her. She spun around, aimed and saw Delenn. Her clothes were a complete mess, and her right arm seemed to be broken.

"Delenn! Here!", she shouted, and was rewarded with a look of recognition and relief just before the minbari collapsed into unconsciousness. "Come on! Let's get a bracelet on her and get out of here," she said to the woman at her side. They hurried up to the passed-out Delenn. Ivanova slapped a bracelet around her ankle and pushed the call button on it.

Cally looked up. "Where's Avon?", she asked.

"Yes?", Vila's said over the radio. Ivanova looked at Cally.

"Teleport this bracelet only," she said. "Cally and I are going after Avon."

Servalan wasn't particularly surprised when she saw the open cell door. She was, however, quite astonished at seeing the unconscious body on the floor in front of it. Ger looked at it with a most peculiar expression on his face.

"Quickly. Get into his clothes," she ordered. Ger glanced at her, but complied without a word. She hadn't planned for this. Not in her wildest dreams had she thought she'd be given a chance like this.

"The rest of them are probably near the main guardroom, where we heard firing before. Go there and try to get them to take you aboard the Liberator. Once you're aboard, take over the ship and return here."

"I'll do my best," Ger said as he slipped into the grey coat. "Getting aboard might be tricky. It won't be easy to fool them, I hardly know anything about this guy."

"I think it'll be quite easy, " Servalan said, smiling. "Trust me, I know these people."

He took off down the hallway. She dialed her blaster to moderate power and aimed carefully at his vanishing back.

"They would never abandon a wounded companion," she said to nobody in particular and fired.

Cally and Ivanova turned a corner, and found Avon face down on the floor, a blaster burn in the middle of his upper back. Cally knelt at his side, checking if he was alive. Ivanova started looking around for enemies. She saw the muzzle of a blaster peeking out of a door further down the hall, and threw herself at the floor. The wall

above her turned to smoke and sparks as blaster bolts hit it. She was just about to tell her companion to get them the hell out of there when the corridor dissolved and reformed into the Liberator's teleport chamber.

A glowing blue vortex opened above Space Command, and the two unwelcome spaceships vanished into it. The soldiers clinging to their respective hulls were torn off by the brutal acceleration. Things begun to return to normal around the station.

Servalan stood looking at the unconscious Avon as the comm panel on the wall chimed. She flipped a switch, and it came to life. The brave young officer who had assaulted the rebel spacecraft appeared on the screen.

"The boarding failed, Supreme Commander, but we managed to place the mines. Shall we try to detonate them?"

"No," she answered. "You did fine. Write a full report and send it to me."

"I will, Supreme Commander," he said and broke the connection, recognising an implicit dismissal when he saw one.

Servalan looked down at Avon again.

"Hello, real thing," she whispered. "Don't you think I'm a lucky little Supreme Commander?"