

Recruiting

Annals of the Librarian Attack Force, part 1

written by Calle Dybedahl

Fran said "Meta-level fluff opens the possibility of Faith/Servalan". There's not much more that need to be said, really. Except possibly that this is a sort of sequel to "Is This the Complaints Department?".

And that it got way out of hand. So far, characters from nine different series have appeared in here. There is Faith from *Buffy*, Callisto and Gabrielle from *Xena*, Ivanova from *Babylon 5*, Jenna and Servalan from *Blake's 7*, Po from *Teletubbies*, Seven of Nine from *Star Trek: Voyager*, Ryoko from *Tenchi Muyo*, Helga from *'Allo, 'Allo* and Sylia from *Bubblegum Crisis*. And a brief mention of Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*.

Quite a mixture, eh?

Featured fandoms: Star Trek: Voyager, Babylon 5, Xena: Warrior Princess, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Blake's 7

Featured pairings: 7of9/Faith, 7of9/Faith/Gabrielle

A.S.S Story codes: fff

Story rating: NC17

The double doors were huge, easily twice as high as Faith herself and wide enough to drive a truck through without scraping the sides. They were made out of dark, almost black, polished wood and covered with carvings of various historical and mythical scenes. The knobs and fittings were made of highly polished dark bronze, and also covered in decorations. It was a pair of doors made to authoritatively inform anyone seeing them that they protected the way in to something damn important.

Faith pushed them open and entered.

"You volunteered us to do what?" Jenna looked incredulous.

Ivanova did her best to look contrite. "Screening applicants. Come on, it's not so bad! Lots of cute girls," she tried.

It didn't seem to help. "That's punishment duty!" Jenna said.

Ivanova looked around, making sure that there was nobody else in the hallway close enough to overhear. She leaned closer to her blonde friend. "And we're well overdue for some punishment, you know that," she said. "This way, we get to choose our punishment, and we get some extra brownie points for volunteering."

"I still don't like it," Jenna said, somewhat mollified.

"Would you rather do checkout desk duty?"

Jenna pretended to think about it. "Er... No. Let's go have a look at the applicants, shall we?"

The room behind the doors was also obviously built to impress. Ceiling so high that it almost vanished in the darkness, somber wood panels covered the walls, many old bookcases held musty tomes, large stuffed armchairs dotted the floor and all of it was sparsely lit by occasional gaslights.

Faith stopped just inside the doors, unsure of what to do. She had a paper directing her to this address, but it didn't say what to do once she got here. She'd assumed she'd be met, or that there at least would be someone to ask.

"Hello?", she said. The sound of her voice drowned in the age-old dust.

She could hear someone breathing. Very faint, a normal girl would never have caught it.

"Um, I can hear you, you know," she said.

"Well. Fancy that," a fair voice said from somewhere in the darkness. "Although I guess you wouldn't be here if you were what you look like. Here for the job, I guess?"

Faith took a few steps forward, more or less aiming for an armchair.

"Yeah," she said. "You the one looking for people?"

"No, no, no," came the reply. "I'm just another... *special* girl looking to make a living."

She brushed some dust off the chair and sat down. "Special how?" she asked the voice in the darkness.

"I used to be a god," the voice said. "But I lost my powers and now I'm just immortal."

"And you're looking for work? What d'you need that for?"

"Do you have *any* idea how *hungry* you can get when you're starving and you *just can't die*?"

"Honestly, no. Me, I'm way mortal. Name's Faith."

The breathing in the darkness sounded odd for a few moments, as if the breather tried to force herself under control. Faith checked that she could easily reach her knife.

"I'm Callisto," the voice said. "From Cirra. Before Xena destroyed it and killed my family."

"Oh," Faith said. "You're from *that* show. Never really watched it myself, but I hear it was kinda interesting."

"Not if you had to live it."

"I guess. Mine wasn't much fun either, that way. You seen anything of the hiring lady yet?"

"No."

Ivanova and Jenna looked down at the applicant in front of them through their dark sunglasses. They were dressed identically, in tight black tops, black jeans and serious black boots. They were standing near the middle of a white brightly lit room with two obvious doors, one at each end. Jenna held a clipboard and a pencil, Ivanova had folded her arms across her chest and did her fairly impressive best to look threatening.

"Which series did you say you were from?" Jenna asked.

"The teletubbies," the plump, red thing in front of them said.

"Er, Miss... Po, was it? I really don't think you have what it takes to be a librarian," Ivanova said.

"Aw, please? I've been practicing with my tubby shotgun! Again, again! I can nearly shoot without falling over now!"

"I'm afraid that's not quite enough," Jenna said. "But we appreciate the effort. We'll keep you on the waiting list."

The plump red thing sighed deeply and slouched out.

"What the hell *was* that?" Ivanova whispered when she thought it was out of earshot.

"I'm not sure I want to know," Jenna whispered back. "Next!" she yelled.

An athletic young woman clad in an extremely short red skirt and a matching top, with knee-high leather boots to go with them, walked into the room. Her reddish-blond hair was cut short, and she had a sai dagger stuck down the top of each boot.

"Right," Jenna said, looking down at her clipboard, "state your name and your originating series."

Ivanova slid her shades down her nose and looked over them at the new applicant.

"Gabrielle?" she said.

Gabrielle's face broke into a smile that rivaled the ceiling fixtures for illuminating power.

"Hi, guys" she said.

Jenna looked up. "You're applying to be a librarian?" she asked.

"Yeah. The series ended, so I need a new job."

Ivanova pushed her sunglasses back up. "I guess Xena is waiting out there, then?" she said.

Gabrielle's smile faded. "No. She decided to stay dead, because of some slant-eyed trollop. So it's just me."

Jenna smiled at her. "There's nothing 'just' about you, darling." She returned her attention to the clipboard. "Let's see. Gabrielle of Potadeia, from Xena Warrior Princess, isn't it?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"You're a bard, right?"

Another nod.

Jenna started filling out the form.

"Combat experience... five years or more. Sexual orientation... suitable for the Force. Dress style... revealing... Preferred duty... Do you want a front-line combat posting, or are you aiming more for diplomacy or research?"

"Oh, hey, combat of course. Can't just stand by while you guys put yourself in danger, can I?"

"Recommendations from current Attack Librarians... Of course you have. Susan, sign here." She handed the clipboard to Ivanova.

"Welcome to the Librarian Attack Force, Assistant Attack Librarian Gabrielle," she said. "If you'll just wait outside while we go through the rest of the applicants, we'll sort out the paperwork later."

"Welcome, ladies."

The voice was soft yet filled with authority. Feminine, but without any doubt the voice of someone used to being obeyed. "I suppose you're from the Henchperson Agency?"

Faith looked towards the figure standing in the just opened doorway. She was lit up from behind, so she couldn't see much except an attractively shaped outline.

"Yeah," she said. "You're the one who's hiring?"

"Yes. My name is Supreme Commander Servalan, and you two are, I believe, Callisto and Faith."

"That's your *name*?" Faith said.

"What?"

"Supreme Commander. That's actually your name?"

"My parents had high ambitions. Is that a problem?"

"No problem at all, just wondering. So, what's this gig about?"

Servalan walked into the room. She stopped in front of a small, round table and lit a candle, revealing her long white dress, close-cropped black hair and sharp features to Faith.

"I am trying to take over the world," Servalan said. "In order to do that, I need some help. The agency assured me that the people they sent would have no problems with working for evil, and be quite used to acts of violence against innocents. Were they right?"

Faith shrugged. "I guess."

"There are no innocents," Callisto said. "Only victims."

"Good," Servalan said. "Pay will be according to the Agency's standard contract. I assume that's satisfactory, or you wouldn't be here. So, down to business."

"Er, boss?" Faith interrupted. "According to union regs you've got to specify any arch-enemies you have, and any major enemies who might be expected to oppose your current plans."

Servalan hesitated. "Well," she said. "Currently, I don't have any arch-enemies. For my current plans, I expect opposition from the Librarian Attack Force. Exactly how much opposition, and precisely which Attack Librarians they'll send, I don't know. Is that answer good enough?"

"Cool. Let's do the plan thing."

"Right. We will be attempting to seize a book..."

Gabrielle concentrated. She stood on a short street, with three-story buildings on each side. The windows were broken, the ground was liberally strewn with litter of various kinds, and at any time an enemy could appear where she least expected it. She was dressed in black shorts, black sports bra and knee-high black boots. The front of the bra had LIBRARIAN printed on it in large white letters, right across her breasts. The fabric of the clothes felt strange to her, although not nearly as strange as the weapons.

Something moved in a window.

She flipped forward. As she flew through the air, she aimed her two automatic pistols towards the window, repeatedly pulled the triggers and let a hail of lead tear the paper target to shreds. As she landed, she sank down on one knee, dropped the empty clips out of the guns and quickly reloaded. Three more targets to go.

No, she didn't really like these weapons. They didn't give her the fine level of control she got with her sais. Oh, sure, they did a lot more damage in a shorter amount of time -- but in her experience, just doing lots of damage was rarely the right thing. It was most often better to do exactly the right amount of damage at exactly the right place.

Another target popped out, behind a chimney up on a roof. She dropped and rolled, fired while she was on her back in the dust. Another paper person became confetti.

Back up on her feet, reload. The move had been a fraction of a second slower than it should be. The stupid guns kicked back when she fired and threw her balance ever so slightly off.

She ran forward. She didn't just have to hit all the targets before they went away again, she'd also be judged on how fast she ran through the course.

Two targets at once, one in a doorway to her left and one in a window on her right. No time for unfamiliar things. While still running, she dropped the guns, pulled her legs up under her, pulled her sais out of their boot sheaths and threw them, one in each direction. They tore through the necks of the silhouettes more or less simultaneously, and split second later Gabrielle somersaulted over the finishing line. She landed in front of Ivanova and Jenna.

Ivanova looked first at the panting young woman and then at her own stopwatch. "Bloody hell," she said.

Jenna peered over Ivanova's shoulder. "Faster than you, was she?"

"She was faster than just about *anybody*," Ivanova replied. "No miss penalties and that last double shot cut a full second all by itself. I think we may have a new record here."

"No," Jenna said. "Croft's done better."

"Croft?" Ivanova looked questioning.

"Yeah. You know, over in procurement? Revealing-style clothes, long pony-tail, fantastic breasts?"

"Oh yeah, her."

"I take it I passed the test?" Gabrielle said.

"What? Oh, marvelously," Jenna said. "Not that there was any doubt, but you're new and we've got to follow the regs. Lunch?"

"You're the teachers. If you say lunch, lunch it is."

"Good," Ivanova said, sliding a hand down Gabrielle's thigh. "Your place or ours?"

Faith put the binoculars on the table beside her and rubbed her temples. She'd been looking at a damn entrance for hours, the room was hot and stuffy, her head hurt and the incessant sound of Callisto sharpening her sword was driving her nuts.

"Are you ever going to be finished with that?" she asked.

"No," came the calm answer.

She wasn't being paid enough for this.

"I'm going for a walk," she said. "I'll call in and give the boss the daily report while I'm out." She grabbed her leather jacket and headed for the door without waiting for a reply.

They'd spent twenty-eight days in the converted attic room. Twenty-eight days waiting for a certain delivery vehicle to show up. Twenty-eight days looking at the entrance to the LAF compound, watching well-trained beautiful women come and go. Twenty-eight days cooped up with a scantily clad amazingly sexy ex-goddess with absolutely *no* libido whatsoever.

'Frustrated' didn't even begin to describe how she felt.

She walked down the street, trying to look small and helpless in the vain hope that some numb-skull would attack her. But of course she had no such luck. Maybe in a couple of hours, after nightfall. Or maybe not.

A couple of blocks down the street, Faith walked down a half-flight of stairs and into a dimly lit bar. If she couldn't get sex or violence, at least she could buy booze. Boring as the job had been so far, at least it paid well.

"Whisky. The good kind. Bring the bottle and a beer glass."

The first time she ordered that the bartender didn't believe her. After he'd seen her -- five foot seven inches of thin girl just out of her teens -- drink three pints of hundred-proof alcohol and still walk straight, he believed her. Damn Slayer metabolism. Took her half the night and a small fortune to get decently tanked, and when she did she sobered up in less than an hour.

She filled the glass, emptied half of it and filled it up again. Famous fucking Grouse. Could be worse.

"Bring me the phone, will you?"

Might as well get the reporting over with.

"It's me," she told the phone. "Still hasn't seen it. ... Yeah, we've been looking. ... Yeah, I remember what it's supposed to look like. ... Callisto, of course. Who else? ... Yeah, we'll keep watching. I'll be in touch."

She emptied the glass and filled it up with the last of the bottle. She was starting to feel a bit tipsy. Maybe she'd just keep drinking until she fell off the bar stool or her money ran out, whichever came first. If she did, she'd probably be just drunk enough by the time she got back to the apartment that she'd make another attempt to seduce Callisto. Or possibly just try to feel her up. Which would get her no reaction at all from the ex-goddess. Getting kicked in the head would've been more satisfying.

On second thought, one bottle of whisky was probably enough.

"Are you human?"

The question came from a tall, blonde woman sitting a few chairs down the bar.

"What?" Faith said.

"Are you human?" the woman repeated. "I have just seen you drink almost a liter of 45 percent alcohol. If you are human, I will help you get to a hospital before you pass out."

One thing to be said for the blocks around the LAF compound, they sure had more than the normal share of weird babes.

"I'm a bit more than human," she said. "I can drink a lot more than this before it's bad for me. Actually, I'm not sure if I *can* drink enough to hurt me."

"Good," the woman said. "I will not worry, then." She turned back to her cup of coffee.

Faith had second look at her. Curvy. Very nice legs. *Very* nice chest. Pretty face. Strange metal ornament circling most of her left eye. Dressed in a sensible white blouse, grey skirt reaching below the knee and black shoes with two-inch heels.

"I'm Faith," she said.

"I am Seven," the woman said. "Pleased to meet you."

"You with the Librarian Attack Force?"

"I intend to be. Their monthly applicant screening is tomorrow morning, at which I am scheduled to appear. I do believe that I fulfill their requirements, and that they will accept my application."

"Are you going to appear dressed like that?"

Seven looked down at herself. "That is my intention. Is there a problem? According to my research, this is appropriate attire for a female librarian."

Faith got up from her stool. She was actually a tiny bit wobbly. Must be all the sitting still recently. She walked over to Seven, standing really close behind her and placing her hands on her hips.

"A normal sort of librarian, sure," she whispered into Seven's ear. "But these are *attack* librarians. They'll want something more... interesting."

She slid her hands upwards, until she was touching the undersides of Seven's breasts.

"I see. That does make sense. I have observed that stressful situations such as combat do increase the sexual drive in humans. I will dress more appropriately tomorrow. Are you trying to approach me for sexual purposes?"

"Er... yes," Faith said, somewhat taken aback.

"Good," Seven said. "Then I suggest you follow me back to my room, on the pretext of helping me select suitable clothing for my application tomorrow."

Now that was a kind of weird Faith could entirely live with. She moved her hands up a bit, cupping Seven's breasts and lightly pinching the erect nipples she found there.

"You want to finish your coffee first, or shall we just take off?"

"We will leave now," Seven said. "The 'taking off' part comes later."

"I am Sturmbannbibliothekarinführer Helga Geerhart," the middle-aged blonde woman said. "It is my job to teach you the history of the Librarian Attack Force."

Gabrielle was sitting near the back of one of the large lecture halls. She knew she really ought to pay attention, but she hadn't been sleeping much the night before and she just couldn't make herself stick to listening. Her mind kept drifting away, passing through random thoughts and usually ending up with vivid images of Jenna's and Susan's naked bodies. Which would be distracting enough, even if she hadn't been tired.

"The true origin of the Librarian Attack Force is not known. The earliest reliable reports we have are from the first burning of the Library of Alexandria in the year 47 before the common era. We have scrolls with eyewitness reports of a group of Greek women who valiantly tried to defend the library, put out the fires and rescue the scrolls. They succeeded passably well, and the library survived."

"We are not sure who these Greek women were. The most common theory is that they were Amazons, who had fled their ancestral lands when first Alexander and later the Romans conquered them. This we cannot prove."

Gabrielle tried to picture Ephiny and Solari protecting a library. Yeah, that worked. Would be a bit strange for them at first, but not impossibly so. She decided to believe in the Amazon theory.

"After that, we have a number of documents from all over the world describing what must have been members of the Force. We have tales of warrior women appearing to protect books or other forms of writing in China, in Rome, in India, in just about anywhere where writing had been invented. But it is not until the year 389 of the common era and the final burning of the library at Alexandria that we have an actual mention of the Force and references to the Head Librarian and L-Space."

"The final burning of Alexandria was due to religious conflict, but this is irrelevant. What is relevant is that copies of the diaries of a worker at the library was preserved. We do not know her name, or exactly what her function at the library was, but we do know what she saw. She describes the fanatical horde outside the library, and how they set fire to the buildings and prevented anyone from leaving. This, unlike the first burning, was no accident. It was a very intentional attempt to destroy the library. Our unknown reporter describes how two of the local librarians went among the shelves full of scrolls to get help. At first, she says she thought they were crazy, but when they came back accompanied by a group of well-armed women claiming to belong to a fighting force of librarians she changed her mind. She describes how she helped carry scrolls away from the burning library by way of passages between shelves she had never previously seen. She talks about how she heard things move in the darkness between the unknown shelves, and how people became lost or mad while walking among them. What she describes is, of course, L-Space."

"Psst, Gabrielle!"

Gabrielle looked up.

"Are you coming to the party tonight?" an oriental-looking girl sitting in front of her asked.

"Party?" Gabrielle said. "What party?"

"For the new Assistant Librarians, of course! There's a new round of screenings today."

"Already? Have we really been here that long?"

"Sure doesn't seem like it, does it? Anyway, are you coming or not? And if you are, will you bring those two hotties you usually hang out with?"

Gabrielle smiled. "I'll come, and I think they will too if they can. They said something about being on guard duty tonight."

"Cool. I'll put you all on the guest list. We'll be at the Stained Page, a couple of blocks east of the main gate. You know it?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"...clearly showing the dangerous nature of L-Space," the lecturer droned on. "You will not venture into it yourselves until you have your L-Space qualifications, unless you are accompanied by someone so qualified. In the year 1153 of the common era, ..."

Faith looked up at the sign. *The Stained Page*, it said. Which was where Seven had said she was when she called.

As soon as she'd put the phone back on the hook she'd thrown a curt "I'm going out" towards Callisto, grabbed her leather jacket and left. The previous night with Seven had been the best sex she'd had in a *long* while, and if she had any chance of a repeat performance she was damn well going to take it. It was as if the woman had absorbed several lifetimes' worth of sexual practices, and was quite eager to try them all out one after another. If Faith had been a normal girl, there was no way she would've been able to walk home in the morning.

She opened the door and entered.

Inside, it was dark, noisy and crowded. Multicolored lights flashed in time to the music, smoke covered the dance floor to knee height. The music was purely for dancing, its rhythms nearly hypnotic in their seeming simplicity. The crowd, both on the dance floor and sitting at the tables, was almost exclusively women from the LAF compound. Which, from Faith's point of view, was perfectly all right. She headed for the bar. There was usually something or someone interesting at the bar, and if she just hang around she felt sure she'd run into Seven eventually.

Gabrielle was dancing. She thought she was dancing with a strange oriental girl with enormous spiky blue-green hair and a long tail, but she wasn't sure. Not that it mattered much. Moving was the main thing, moving to the beat and letting it carry her into another state of mind.

It still amazed her that it'd been a whole month since she was accepted into the LAF. It felt both like it had been much longer and much less than that. Her days had been so full of new things, things to see, learn and do -- much like her nights, although what she'd been doing then wasn't all that new. Having two other girls in bed with her was new, of course. Not that she hadn't wanted to try it before, but Xena was much too jealous to handle it. Susan and Jenna, on the other hand, seemed quite willing to try out just about anything. Which was perfectly fine with her.

The first few weeks had mostly been various kinds of evaluation, the Force figuring out what they needed to teach their new recruits. Which, in Gabrielle's case, pretty much boiled down to handling firearms and electronic equipment. She still didn't like the guns, but radios were amazingly useful things and computers seemed to hold a lot of promise.

The beat went on, never-ending. The flashing lights pulsed, revealing the world to her in a series of differently colored still images. Flash blue, and newly minted Assistant Librarian Seven of Nine was in front of her, blonde hair falling down to black t-shirt clinging to voluptuous chest. Darkness. Flash red, and another girl appeared, long dark hair, curvy figure, taller than Gabrielle, shorter than Seven. Not a librarian. Darkness. Flash green, and the three of them were dancing with each other. The girl with the tail was nowhere to be seen. Darkness. Flash blue. Darkness. Flash red, and the non-LAF girl was kissing Seven and fondling her butt. Darkness, and Gabrielle moved closer and kissed the non-LAF girl's slender neck. Flash green, and the girl turned and met Gabrielle's lips with her own. Darkness, and Gabrielle closed her eyes and let darkness rule, savoring the feeling of a hot tongue playing in her mouth. Not having any idea who she was kissing was turning her on something incredible. Discarding the last remnants of any caution she might have had, she pushed a hand in between herself and the dark-haired girl and opened her leather pants. Slid her hand further down, finding coarse hair and slick wetness. She felt more than she heard the girl groan as she pushed a finger up inside her.

She felt hands reach around the other girl and pull Gabrielle's top up, revealing her breasts. She opened her eyes, and in a flash of green met Seven of Nine's desire-clouded gaze. With the hand she didn't have stuck down the dark-haired girl's pants, she ripped Seven's shirt entirely off. The nameless girl's hand reached in under Gabrielle's skirt, and without the slightest hesitation a couple of stiff fingers travelled up her vagina. She closed her eyes again, groaned. One hand pumping the dark-hair's pussy, the other squeezing Seven's large breast, fingers fucking her, a mouth pressed to her own, hands on her bare breasts -- probably Seven's, but she wasn't sure, which excited her even more -- all in perfect time to the pulsing music. Floating on a sea of pure pleasure, she just wanted it to go on, to continue forever.

But of course it didn't. Eventually she grabbed the dark-haired girl as hard as she could, screamed her ecstasy into the solid noise and came like she'd rarely done before. Her vision faded, and for a few eternal moments her entire world was pure pleasure.

When she regained her senses, the dark-haired girl and Seven were both gone.

"Where have you been?"

Callisto was intently looking out the window through the binoculars.

Faith threw her jacket at the bed. "Out," she said. "Why? Did anything happen?"

"Yes, Faith, something did happen," a voice said from behind her. Servalan's voice. "The car you have been waiting for arrived. And we are now several hours late in going after it, since you weren't here."

"Oh. Sorry, boss. We've been waiting so long and all, you know..."

"Never mind. It'll work out. Callisto?"

"Everything's quiet. So quiet. Like a battlefield after death has silenced the screams of the wounded."

Servalan looked slightly taken aback. "Er... that's fine," she said.

Faith gave her an "I've been living with this for four weeks" kind of look.

"No need to wait any further," Servalan said. "Let's go in. You know what we're after."

Her room at the compound was dark and empty. Which was as it should be, really, but at the moment Gabrielle didn't feel like being alone.

She'd left the party shortly after her dance-floor fuck, feeling that whatever happened after that had to be downhill. Like so many times before, she missed Xena. The tall warrior had been a point of stability for her, someone she used to know she could always rely on. With Xena around, she'd never been alone. Not even when she wasn't with her.

Maybe she'd go see if Jenna and Susan were still on guard. They were the closest to friends she had here. Given time, they'd probably be real friends and not just bed partners.

Occasionally, she envied the closeness the two women seemed to have and hoped she'd be able to join in it. She'd come to the Librarian Attack Force looking for a job, but now she knew that to be able to stay she'd have to make it into a family. Somehow.

She removed the old red top and skirt she'd worn to the nightclub. They smelled of smoke, sweat and sex, which wasn't really suitable for visiting people who were working. Since nakedness wasn't much better, she pulled on her black LAF-issue top, shorts and boots. Once she'd got used to the slick elastic fabric they were quite comfortable. Not to mention very easy to move in and amazingly resistant to wear and tear. Plus, they seemed to actually repel dirt. Quickly, she pulled a brush through her hair a few times, stuck her sais into their sheaths and left.

The black car stopped right in front of the handful of steps up to the LAF compound entrance, and Faith casually stepped out of it.

"Hi!" she said. The guards looked first at each other, then at Faith. They were both dressed in black tops with "LIBRARIAN" on them, black shorts and black boots. One had an automatic pistol hanging at each hip, the other an M16 hanging in a strap from her shoulder.

"Evening," the one with the M16 said. "What can we do for you?"

While she spoke, Faith climbed the few steps and ended up right in front of the silent librarian. She grabbed her top and pulled her close. With more than human speed, she took a pistol from her captive's hip and aimed it right between the talking woman's eyes.

"Well," she said. "You can open the doors. That is, if you want you and your friend here to live much longer."

She hesitated for a moment or two, then she unlocked and opened the door.

"Good girl," Faith said. She pushed the woman she held forward with all her strength, knocking her head into her friend's. They both fell down, unconscious. "It's open," Faith said in the direction of the car. "Come on."

As soon as she heard Callisto's and Servalan's steps behind her, she ran into the compound.

"What is it you're guarding?" Gabrielle asked. "Or am I not allowed to know that yet?"

She sat on the floor of a marble-covered corridor. Along one side were large bullet-proof windows looking out over the park that made up about three quarters of the LAF compound. On the other side was nothing but a very serious armored door. On each side of the door was a chair, and on the chairs Ivanova and Jenna sat. Gabrielle sat across the corridor from them, under a window.

"I don't think anyone would mind you knowing," Jenna said. "But we don't know either, which makes it hard for us to tell you."

"It's some sort of book," Ivanova said. "That much I saw when they brought it in."

"Big surprise there," Gabrielle said. "You'll be here until morning, or what?"

"Yep," Jenna said. "Another thrill-filled day in the Librarian Attack Force."

Ivanova got up from her chair. "Did you hear steps?" she asked.

Jenna and Gabrielle rose as well. "Which way?" Jenna said.

"That way," Ivanova said. She pointed towards one end of the corridor, and as if her movement had been a signal a small metallic object came flying and landed a couple of steps in front of them, hissing softly.

"What is tha..." Gabrielle said. The thing tore open with a bang, and smoke started to pour out. In less than a second, it was impossible to see from one side of the corridor to the other.

"Gabrielle! Alarm panel, at the end of the corridor behind you!"

She wasn't sure if it was Susan or Jenna who shouted. Possibly both. Either way, she ran. The corridor was entirely filled with smoke, smoke that irritated her lungs and made her cough. She dragged her fingers along the inside wall, to keep her orientation.

Behind her, she heard the sound of fighting. Not guns. Flesh on flesh, and steel on steel. Behind her, she also heard steps. Running steps, coming closer.

Glass under her fingers. She stopped, pulled out a sai and was about to hit the glass covering the alarm button with the pommel when someone slammed into her. She fell, tried to turn and get her attacker under her. Failed, whoever it was was both faster and stronger than she was. She landed hard, the back of her head hitting the stone floor. For a moment, she saw stars.

"No, no, no," a voice above her said. "Can't let you.. You!"

Gabrielle blinked fiercely, tried to clear her eyes. She looked up -- and saw the dark-haired girl from the nightclub.

"You!" she said.

They lay there, looking at each other, for seconds that felt like days. Back in the corridor the sounds of fighting died away.

"Faith!" someone yelled. "We're leaving!"

She knew that voice.

Callisto's voice. Bad, insane Callisto's voice.

The dark-haired girl -- Faith, apparently -- tore her gaze away from Gabrielle. She got up and ran off into the smoke, invisible after a handful of steps. As soon as she could, Gabrielle threw her sai at the alarm button.

Too late, the wailing of sirens filled the corridors of the Librarian Attack Force compound.

"I don't like hospitals," Jenna said. "I don't like the way they *smell*."

She was pacing back and forth in the waiting room outside the surgical ward of the LAF hospital. Gabrielle considered asking if she'd prefer the smell of vomit and gangrenous flesh, which was the sort of hospital smell she was used to. But she didn't.

"She'll pull through," she said. "Susan's a tough one."

"It shouldn't have happened! We were right in the middle of the damn compound, they shouldn't have been able to reach us at all!"

"You are absolutely right."

The voice came from the entrance. It was on the dark side for a woman's voice, had a slight Japanese accent and was utterly calm. The woman it came from was tall, dark-haired and carried an aura of authority. She was dressed in a somber business suit and carried a dark grey briefcase.

"It appears that we have grown lax," she said. "We have become so used to going out somewhere and fighting the forces of evil that when the forces of evil come to us, they find us nearly defenseless. And so, my librarian Susan Ivanova gets a sword in the gut and a very dangerous book gets stolen from right under our noses. Neither of those are acceptable."

She walked into the waiting room and put her briefcase on the table in front of Gabrielle.

"You have not met me," she said. "You may not have heard of me. I am Assistant Head Librarian Syla Stingray. I run the Force, according to the Head Librarian's instructions."

Gabrielle offered her hand. "Hi!" she said. "I'm Gab..."

"I know well who you are, Gabrielle of Potadeia," the Assistant Head Librarian interrupted. "As I know Jenna Stannis and Susan Ivanova."

She opened the briefcase and took out some pictures, which she spread over the table. "I believe you may recognize some of these people," she said. Gabrielle and Jenna leaned over the table.

"Servalan!" Jenna exclaimed.

"Callisto," Gabrielle said. "I knew that was her voice I heard."

"These were taken by the surveillance cameras after Gabrielle triggered the alarms. Who the third woman is we don't know yet. Since you two each know one of them, it is not unreasonable to assume that Ivanova may know the third. We will see when she wakes up."

She closed the briefcase. "Gabrielle," she said. "You are promoted to full Attack Librarian. Jenna, you, Ivanova and Gabrielle will form a special unit to investigate this attack and repossess the stolen book. Questions?"

Jenna looked slightly shocked. "No, Ma'am. We'll get started as soon as Ivanova wakes up."

"Good. Don't tax her, I want her to recover fully. Good day, ladies."

Syla left without waiting for a reply.

"Jenna?" Gabrielle sounded nervous.

"Hmm?"

"What kind of book *is* this?"

"It's an instruction manual on how to build sections of L-Space," Servalan said. "With it, there is no limit to where I can reach."

Faith sat on the edge of a table with her booted feet resting on the seat of an armchair.

"Cool," she said. "So where exactly do you want to reach?"

There was an insane gleam in Servalan's eyes.

"*Everywhere*," she said.