

# **The Ultimate Resurrection Story**

*by Mary D. Bloemker*

Avon took one last look at Blake's dead face even as the Federation shock troops quickly and silently took up positions to form a deadly, impenetrable circle around him. *So, this is the way it ends, Blake. One game too many. It's a pity you didn't last long enough to see how many you took down with you.*

Grimly, he raised his gun, aiming directly in front of him and at any Federation trooper unfortunate enough to be in the way. None moved; they stayed as still and quiet as Arlen had when she had stood passively by to watch Avon shoot down Blake.

An eerie smile spread across Avon's face as he readied his grip. *Let's see how many more I can bring down to even out the count, shall we, Blake?*

And with that, he fired.

The shots woke him up with a start. Darkness was a solid wall around him -- no, not quite. As he stared, unwilling to move or to breathe until the nature of the mystery revealed itself, images resolved, the gloom brightening to a murky grayness. Around him he saw bodies carelessly sprawled on the floor, and the Dream came back to him in a rush of horror. Nudging the shoulder of the form lying next to him, he turned the body over, fully expecting to stare into the dead, twisted face of Blake. Instead, he found himself looking down at the peacefully snoring visage of a complete stranger.

He sat bolt upright, his breath coming in sharp gasps. Now he could hear the persistent chorus of snoring that filled the room, this room with oddly familiar contours. Nearby, his gaze lit on an upturned face that sparked a reaction.

"Vila!" Avon fairly pounced on the man, tripping over two prone bodies as he did. "Vila, wake up!"

The man's groan reverberated to the shaking Avon was giving him. "G'way," he mumbled irritably, turning over to escape the unwelcome intrusion.

Avon stopped, lifted his eyes to scan the room. Moments ago, an eternity ago, he had seen Vila gunned down in a room totally unlike this dark cubicle. Or had he? Had he lived through that nightmare, or was that all it was -- a nightmare?

Now he saw a largish bulk nestled in a far corner, and despite himself, his breath caught in his throat.

Gan.

"Vila, wake up!"

Bleary eyes blinked up at him. "What do you want?" the man grumbled sourly.

"Vila, where are we?"

"What are you, crazy?" Vila tried to shrug him off without success. "Let go of me, I'm trying to sleep ..."

"Vila, where are we?" he demanded, fairly hissing the words from between clenched teeth.

"Where do you think we are?" the other man replied, at the end of his patience. "Where we've been for the past four months -- halfway between nowhere and hell, that's where. I knew it, his mind's finally cracked," he added under his breath.

"The London," Avon whispered, the impossible truth finally coming upon him. "We're still on the London."

"Still?" Vila snorted. "You have gone round the twist, haven't you? Where the blazes did you think we'd be?"

Avon released Vila finally, rocking back on his heels to think. He had to think. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he murmured absently as his gaze drifted, unwillingly, back to Gan snoring away in his corner of the room. In the chaos of the Dream and Reality, a smile formed on his lips, unnoticed by Vila, who had used Avon's preoccupation to pull away from him to curl up in another part of the crowded barracks. "No ..." Avon said, nodding as the smile grew, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."



The next morning, Avon ate alone. Which wasn't a surprise, really. He'd been eating alone ever since the London left Earth. But in the Dream ...

He was tired. Not surprising, either, considering he'd lived years in a single night. Had he lived? Or had he merely dreamt? Although he wasn't a registered precog, he had, on occasion, experienced precognitive flashes, always with frightening clarity. And the Dream had been frighteningly clear. He was inclined to take it as a prediction of what would happen ... correction, what might happen, if he allowed Blake to follow his own course.

He looked up to see Nova and Vila sitting together with Gan at another table. He had seen that before, but not in real time. In the Dream. He unobtrusively laid a hand over his eyes, straining to remember, letting the scene play out in his mind, seeing there the movements of the three men, the other prisoners walking behind them with shuffling, drugged steps. In his mind's eye, he could see Blake carrying his tray to sit with Jenna, carefully measuring the small amount of food he would allow himself to keep the drug level as low as possible ... Avon lifted his hand, centered his gaze on Blake ... the scenario was uninterrupted. Exactly the same. Jenna looked up at Avon with the same contempt as in his mind, Blake touched her arm and shook his head in exactly the same instant as his Dream self ...

Suddenly, Avon felt as though he had a chance, a real chance, to change the events in the Dream. All was going exactly according to schedule; whose schedule, he didn't know, but soon they would reach the crossroads that could change it all. Instinctively, he knew what had to be done. Very soon, the space battle that had enabled Blake's escape plan to begin would rock the ship, and

Blake would expect him to take over the computer room. He had to prevent that. He could prevent that. But at the same time, he had to make sure that he was part of the "expendable" expedition sent across to board the Liberator. Blake, by nature, was guaranteed, and Raiker's injured vanity would suggest Jenna to him as well. It was therefore necessary that he do something to incur Raiker's wrath as well ...



"... an intelligent man can adapt," Avon heard himself saying to Blake as they sat opposite one another in their flight chairs.

"Or recognize an alternative."

"I already have one," Avon replied, his body tensed with excitement. This was where his opportunity to change the course lay.

"A private deal with the crew to fake the ship's running log? You've had four months to think about that. And it didn't take you that long to realize they'd have to kill you afterwards to keep you quiet."

Avon smiled slightly. *This is it.* "Actually, no. I have a better idea."

Blake swivelled his head to regard Avon. "A better idea?"

Avon nodded, once.

"Are you going to tell me about it?"

"Not yet. There are still a few things which must happen first."

Blake snorted. "You don't have an idea, do you?" He turned in his seat, his voice low. "Avon, this is our only chance, and you're the only one who can pull off your end of it ..."

"You're wrong, Blake -- it isn't our only chance," Avon said quietly. He was staring ahead blandly, a maddening half-smile of derision curling his lips.

Blake's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, there's another way, Blake. My way. It will save the lives of all the prisoners on board, get us this ship, and some rather interesting bonuses into the bargain."

Blake stood slowly, his movement signalling to Jenna and the others to enter the room. "If you had a plan, why didn't you say something before?"

Jenna stepped forward, eyeing Avon suspiciously. "This plan of yours -- would this have something to do with your deliberately antagonizing Raiker this morning?"

"He did what?"

Jenna gave Blake a dry look combined with a curt nod in Avon's direction. "I thought he'd gone suicidal on us."

"Hardly," Avon said, a fragment of the Dream resurfacing. *Hardly more suicidal than drawing a gun on a room full of Federation troopers, anyway.* The wry smile elicited by the thought brought a new flush of anger to Blake's face.

Blake took up a challenging stance, copied by each of his disciples in turn. "So. What is this marvellous new plan of yours?"

"I can't tell you that yet."

"When can you tell us?"

"When -- and if -- I need your help."

"Oh? And when will that be, do you suppose? We're due at Cygnus Alpha any day now. You don't have any time, Avon."

If Avon had had any doubts, the shock wave that shuddered through the ship just then dispelled them. The more experienced deep-space veterans, including Jenna, started violently as they recognized the sounds of a hull impact.

Avon's smile, suppressed unsuccessfully until now, broke wide. "Phase One has already begun."

"You're not seriously trying to suggest that you planned that?" Blake demanded incredulously.

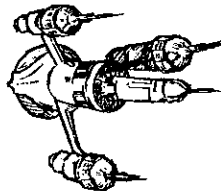
Ignoring him, Avon went on, "Phase Two should begin shortly. Let's hope that Raiker doesn't forgive insults easily."

"That should be the least of your worries," Jenna told him drily.

"It is. As Phase Two requires a modicum of cooperation from you, Blake, I will tell you this once, and only once. The only important thing for you and Jenna to remember is that you are to do everything I tell you, without question and without hesitation. The slightest bit of unguided initiative of your part, and I will leave you to your fate. Understood?"

"Not a bit of it," Blake returned icily, and Jenna's stony glare was tacit agreement.

"I didn't ask you to agree with it, only to remember it." And with that, he steadfastly refused to answer any further interrogatives. It was there several hours later that Raiker, looking for three expendable prisoners, and still smarting under Avon's insults from the morning, came upon them.



Avon was fully aware of the looks that Blake and Jenna were directing at him as they edged along the walkway toward the mystery derelict. They were regarding him with a mixture of suspicion and sheer

awe, and Avon reveled in it. Blake had not said a word to him since Raiker had "volunteered" them for what appeared to be a suicide mission. He was obviously trying to fathom why Avon seemed to be looking forward to this expedition; worse, he was trying to figure out how Avon had seemed to know exactly what to expect. Jenna, as always, was content to wait. Never one to waste energy on speculation without facts, she was willing to wait until Avon either volunteered the facts, or the facts volunteered themselves.

As for Avon, although he knew the confusion and rampant speculation going on in both minds, he had no intention of relieving their minds on any point. He certainly did not know why this Dream had been visited upon him, but he knew enough to take full advantage of the opportunity without wasting time trying to figure out where the opportunity came from. And, as he had warned Blake, he was determined to do it the right way this time. His way.

Avon entered through the boarding hatch first, and one glance was enough to fill him with an indescribable emotion, not a speck of which did he allow to reflect on his face. The Liberator. Exactly as he "remembered" it -- well, maybe a touch smaller in places, a little less grand, somewhat more functional in design, but then, he always did have a tendency to think big. It did not alter the feeling that flooded him one iota. It felt as though he had come home.

He waited until he heard the collective gasps of Blake and Jenna before striding to the pilot's console. Sitting in the seat, he took hold of the twin control columns, and stared expectantly at the glittering curvature he was sure housed Zen. On cue, the white pulsing mass he remembered from the Dream formed and buzzed in the corner of the flight deck, and he smiled slightly to himself. The buzzing grew in intensity, and he uttered one word: "Zen."

The buzzing leveled out, the white mass flickered slightly, as though in mild confusion. And then he felt it. The presence of another mind, touching, absorbing, enveloping his own. " ... *like innocence,*" Jenna had said in the Dream. And it was. He felt welcome, as though the ship had been waiting for him. Had it? Had Zen initiated the Dream?

Jenna and Blake stared open-mouthed at Avon, confusion and consternation evident on their faces. Avon smiled. "Zen, deactivate intruder defense mechanism."

There was a momentary splutter of gibberish, the intruding presence receded, and then, +Confirmed.+

The pulsing mass faded, the buzzing ceased. The flight deck was suddenly silent.

"Who was that?" Jenna demanded, whirling around.

"Zen, would you care to greet my friends?"

+Welcome, Kerr Avon. Welcome, Roj Blake. Welcome, Jenna Stannis,+ Zen replied readily.

Blake stepped tentatively toward the golden screen, staring at it in utter confusion and fascination. Under his breath, he muttered, "What the devil --?"

Avon ignored him. "Zen, I want a course plotted from these coordinates, speed, standard by two, implemented on my command."

+Confirmed.+

"Avon, what in hell is going on around here?" Blake, at the end of his patience, whirled to face him.

Avon looked up, seemingly unconcerned with their discomfiture. "You'll find weapons in the rack over there. One to a customer, please. Zen, give me a hard copy readout of three alternative flight plans to galactic coordinates 30, 428, 9930."

+Confirmed.+

"Avon!"

+Information. Intruder alert.+

"Close the boarding hatch, please, Zen," Avon said mildly, scanning the copy as it spewed from his console.

+Confirmed.+

"As you indicated previously, Blake, we don't have all that much time left," Avon said, cutting off another of Blake's attempts to get his attention. "So if you wouldn't mind taking a handgun from the rack and following me to the teleport, we can get this business finished before lunch."



It was undeniably Avon's moment of triumph -- and he intended to milk it for everything it was worth.

He completed the final course corrections languorously, giving them a final visual check before looking up at the small clutch of humans before him. They were a hand-picked lot, though he doubted any of them were aware of that fact. The rest of the London's human cargo, Avon had left in control of the ship, with the regular crew tucked safely away in the prisoners' hold. Leaving them with nearly half the supplies scrounged from the holds of the Liberator, and the flight plans for almost a dozen habitable planets within easy cruising speed, Avon found it easy to dismiss them from his mind. They were, after all, well-provided for, happy, and free, and they certainly had had no complaints when Avon handed control of the London to them only minutes after mysteriously appearing on board the transport with Blake and odd but wonderfully efficient weapons.

Avon had other, more important considerations at the moment than the scruffy lot of condemned prisoners. He regarded his new crew critically. Jenna was running a practiced eye over the ship's fixtures and instrumentation, obviously straining for a chance to get her hands on the controls of this wondrous ship. She had leaped at the opportunity to learn the teleport, amazed and delighted by Avon's trust and the function of the machine.



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Vila, less surly than usual, but still openly suspicious, was returning Avon's gaze with a dark glare of his own. Gan, his arms crossed against his massive chest, eternally patient, was waiting for Avon to speak. And Nova. On a whim, Avon had volunteered the young man, who, in the Dream, had been the first victim of Blake's hopeless mutiny. Nova was an unknown quantity, but he was a scrappy little fighter, and as a result of the ridiculously easy takeover of the London, eternally loyal to Avon.

And then there was Blake. He stood slightly apart from the rest, which, to Avon, spoke volumes about their future relationship. *Blake was never one to let common sense cloud his pride*, Avon thought, smiling to himself. *Given time, though, he'll come to his senses*. In the meantime, though, keeping Blake on a short lead was the order of the day.

He had given not inconsiderable thought to leaving Blake on the London. In the end, he had kept him aboard, because of the Dream and only because of the Dream. Despite the gruesome ending of the nightmare, Blake was important in the scheme of things. His name opened doors, doors sometimes better left unopened, but other, more important doors, ones that Avon fully intended to tackle with his new, precognitive knowledge. Things were going to be very different this time. Very different.

He finally spoke, answering their long-unspoken question. "We are free. We are in command of the fastest ship in the galaxy. We can go where we like, do what we like."

"Under your leadership?" Blake challenged quietly.

"I said, we are free. That means leave if you like. But if you stay, it is because you freely acknowledge that this is my ship."

"He's right, Blake," Jenna spoke up suddenly. "I don't even begin to understand it, but no one has more claim to this ship than he does. It's almost as though it were waiting for him."

"Or him waiting for it," Vila enjoined dourly.

"And in my opinion, Avon's proved himself. I'm satisfied with his claim."

"You said you were a computer man," Blake addressed Avon suspiciously. "There's a mystery here, Avon. What's the answer? We're entitled to at least that much."

"Beginner's luck," Avon answered tersely, looking back down at the console to make further adjustments.

"Leave it, Blake," Vila told him. "He likes his little mysteries, can't you see that?"

Blake backed down reluctantly, shaking his head. Almost wistfully, he muttered, "I just don't understand."

Avon glared at him, and in that moment, the Dream returned. Blake's face blurred, melting into the scarred, twisted visage of the Dream Blake.

*Is it true? Have you betrayed us? Have you betrayed me?*

*Tarrant doesn't understand.*

"Neither do I, Blake," Avon murmured, and both Blakes stared at him. One face held fear, the other confusion, and for a moment, Dream and Reality threatened to merge into a darkness from which Avon knew would be impossible to extricate himself. He turned suddenly on his heel, and the Dream shattered, leaving behind only the puzzled face of Roj Blake, falsely-convicted child molester, and intergalactic babe-in-the-woods.

*No mistakes this time, Blake. This time we're going to do it right.*

"Allright," Blake sighed, capitulating. "It's your ship, Avon. What now?"

*My ship*. Avon could not suppress the surge of satisfaction that rose in him, nor did he make an effort to suppress it. *My ship. The Liberator is my ship*. His smile widened in triumph. *If only you knew what it means to hear you say that, Blake!*

"We're all with you, Avon," Vila said, nudging Nova so that the young man would nod vigorous agreement. "So -- where to first, eh? How about Space City? I've heard some really encouraging things about that place, and ..."

He broke off as Avon looked up at him, a strangely intent expression on the unusually unexpressive face. He glanced down long enough to put the finishing touches on the flight program he had been working on since coming on board. So many things to do, so many plans ... but first things first. "As the first order of business, I have in mind to make a short visit to Saurian Major," he said, turning to face the main screen with a smile. "There's someone there I'd very much like to meet."

**end**