

STAR TREK: THE ENTERPRISE-B CHRONICLES



RETRIBUTION

by David Dietz

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There were thousands—perhaps tens of thousands of them—gathered together some fifty feet below. The incoherence of their mumbling and the clatter of their metallic weapons filled the immense cavern chamber with a sound greater than the roar of a 747 on takeoff.

He stepped forward, onto the edge of the precipice and glanced down at the legion assembled.

Suddenly, their voices became as one. With their eyes and voices directed skyward, towards the man at the edge of the cliff, they chanted his name.

“Muad’dib... Muad’dib...,” they said. The chamber resonated the echo of the crowd’s tumultuous voice.

Muad’dib smiled contentedly to himself. They had come from all over Arrakis. From the far dunes to the north, to the strangely calm sand seas of the south, the Fremen had come. All to see him; all to hear the words of Muad’dib.

Muad’dib ran his right hand through his shoulder-length black hair. Straightening it for moment before raising his palm high above his head, calling for silence. The crowd’s chant ceased, and for a moment, not even the pitter-patter of the feet of the tiny Arrakeen mouse could be heard within the chamber.

“The time has come,” said Muad’dib. The chamber echoed his words.

“You have been shown the weirding way, and now you must be prepared to use it against our enemies.”

Muad’dib paused for effect. Taking in for a moment the intense look on the assembled faces of the Fremen. Muad’dib nodded slightly to himself; they were indeed ready!

“When the spice flow stops, all eyes will turn to Arrakis. The Baron Harkonnen and even the Emperor himself will be forced to deal with us....”

Muad'dib stopped his speech in mid-sentence as he heard a chime ring out from above. The chime was followed by a disembodied voice which seemed to emanate from all around.

“Bridge to Commander Y'Gar,” said the distinctly feminine voice.

Muad'dib glanced about nervously for a moment, as the chamber once again began to echo. This time with the frightened voices of the assembled Fremen who must have believed the voice to be attached to some sort of demon from above.

“Computer: freeze program,” said Muad'dib.

Within seconds, everything that surrounded Muad'dib froze. The assembled Fremen below with their faces contorted in fear, the flames of the torches that lined the walls of the chamber, even the echo of the cavern itself ceased to be. Muad'dib bade the voice from above to continue.

“You have a subspace transmission,” it said.

Muad'dib sighed dejectedly to himself. “Very well, I'll take it in my quarters.”

“Acknowledged,” said the voice.

As the voice disappeared, Muad'dib found himself alone in the dead silence of the chamber. He took one last look around him at the Fremen, the walls, and even at his own stillsuit. He sighed once again before he spoke.

“Computer: end simulation and store relaxation program Y'GAR-4.”

The immense, cavernous chamber faded away into nothingness leaving only a comparatively smaller black room; the walls, floor, and ceiling crisscrossed with yellow lines. Muad'dib—aka Commander D'NadrY'Gar, executive officer of

the *U.S.S. Enterprise*—stepped toward the doorway of the holodeck and exited into a maroon-carpeted corridor.

* * *

The doors parted to admit Y'Gar into the interior of his quarters. As usual, he did not take a moment to notice the room's spartan decor and made a beeline for his work desk, situated at the opposite end of the room. He hurriedly sat down in the plush cushioned chair and turned the tiny view screen sitting atop the desk to face him.

The cheerful face of Communications Officer Saallak filled the screen. She had to have been waiting for Y'Gar to arrive back at his quarters before transferring his call. Y'Gar shook his head slightly. Didn't she have better things to do?

Y'Gar opened the audio channel to the bridge. "Okay, Saallak. I'm here."

"Transferring to your console, now," said Saallak, ending the transmission with a smile and a curiously coy little wink.

Y'Gar shook his head more perceptibly this time as the dark-haired features of the *Enterprise's* communications Vulcan officer were replaced by those of an older Terran woman. She wore the garments of a diplomat, and her pleasant, smiling face was only slightly wrinkled with age. Her constant smile only increased as she ran a hand through her short, but beautifully styled salt-and-pepper hair.

"Hello darling," she finally said to Y'Gar.

"Mother!" said Y'Gar with slight astonishment.

"I see I've caught you playing around again," teased Marianne Ness, noticing his costume stillsuit.

Y'Gar snickered slightly at his mother's always-good-natured ribbing. "I wasn't expecting to hear from you for another month."

"I know, darling," said Marianne, her voice suddenly taking on a more serious tone.

"Has something happened?"

Marianne nodded almost imperceptibly.

"What?" pleaded Y'Gar.

Marianne sighed momentarily. Y'Gar could only guess that whatever it was, it must have caused her some pain. Usually, she tried not to let anything upset her, but whatever she had to tell him must have upset her a great deal.

"Do you remember me telling you the story of how I found you?"

Y'Gar nodded. He had been little more than an infant, and it had sparked off the chain of events that eventually lead him to join Starfleet.

"I was on Yarzon a few days ago for a conference," Marianne continued. "As I was going through some records I needed as reference for some negotiations, I came across a small file which chronicled the activities of a certain renegade tribe. As I read more and more, I discovered that it was this tribe that attacked your village..."

Marianne's voice trailed off slightly. Y'Gar noticed tears welling up in his mother's eyes. She wiped them away with a sweep of her hand.

"So, they know who did it. Do they?" asked Y'Gar.

Marianne nodded. "Not only do they know, but they have known for nearly a decade! And they never told anyone!"

"Why?"

"They figured that it didn't matter since, as far as they knew, there were no survivors of the attack."

Y'Gar sat back, allowing himself to sink into the cushions of his chair. Shock and disbelief ran through his mind. The Yarzonian High Council had found out long ago who had

decimated the village where he had been found as an infant nearly twenty-five years ago, and they were prepared to simply sweep the whole incident under a rug. As if it had never happened.

Y'Gar leaned forward to address his mother on the screen once again.

"Is there anything we can do?"

"As a representative of the Federation, my hands are tied. I can do nothing," said Marianne.

Disgusted, Y'Gar whipped his body back into the cushions of the chair again.

"However," his mother continued, "there is something that *you* can do."

Upon hearing this, Y'Gar leaned forward to face the screen once again. Listening more intently than he ever had to anything else his mother had ever said in his life.

"As the last surviving resident of the village, you do have the right to perform the Shal'Na."

The Retribution, Y'Gar thought.

"Does the High Council know about me?" he wondered.

"Yes," said Marianne. "And they aren't very happy about it. They were hoping to just keep the whole incident hushed up."

I'll bet they were, Y'Gar thought bitterly. "How long do I have?"

"You're expected to arrive on Yarzon in two days. After that, you have a week to perform the rite."

Y'Gar chewed on his lower lip, pondering all that his mother had told him. He didn't have much time, but it was the only way to ensure that all those people who had been slaughtered, including his natural parents, had not died for nothing. He nodded, mentally resolving himself to the task.

“Alright, Mother,” he said to the woman on the screen. “I’ll do my best to see that the right thing is done.”

“Good,” Marianne replied. Before she ended the transmission, she added, “I love you... so much.”

The screen went blank and Y’Gar once again reclined back into the plushness of the cushions of his chair. He folded his hands behind his head and let out a sigh.

* * *

Captain Jack Bairnson ran a hand through his thick mane of fiery red hair as he studied the information on his desktop computer terminal. His eyelids grew heavier as he read the bright type against the black background of the terminal screen. Suddenly, violently, he jerked his head up and squinted his eyes twice before opening them wide, staring straight ahead of him.

Dammit, did it again! he thought. *I’ve got to see if Crispin can whip up something to help me sleep at night.*

At the moment, however, he needed something to keep him awake. At least until he got through these reports. So, Bairnson rose from his chair and paced groggily over to the replicator at the far end of his ready room. He asked the computer to make him a steaming hot cup of orange blossom tea. Within seconds, a clear glass of light brown liquid appeared.

Jack grasped the mug’s handle and started back to his desk. As he was about to reseal himself, he heard the chime of the ready room door.

“Come in,” he called out, placing the mug down on his desk.

The doors parted to reveal the tall, thin figure of Commander Y’Gar. Jack motioned for him to enter, and Y’Gar stepped through the now-opened archway and into the ready room.

Jack asked him to take one of the seats situated in front of his desk, and as Y’Gar did, he took a moment to take in his

shoulder-length black hair, and of course, his unique green-on-green eyes.

"Is something the matter, sir?" asked Y'Gar after a moment.

"Oh... no," said Bairnson pleasantly. "Just haven't been getting enough sleep lately. It's given me the annoying habit of staring from time to time."

Bairnson smiled as Y'Gar nodded his understanding.

"So," Bairnson began again. "What's on your mind, Y'Gar?"

"I'd like to request a leave of absence, sir," said Y'Gar.

Jack sat back in his chair, observing his Yarzonian first officer.

"Y'Gar, I must say I'm a little surprised. You've never made a request like that in all the time you've been on the *Enterprise*."

"There's never been any reason for me to do so, sir. Until now."

"Alright," said Bairnson, his curiosity piqued. "You want to tell me why?"

Y'Gar shifted his position in his chair slightly. Most officers had a tendency to do that when they weren't really prepared to discuss something with their superiors. At least that was what Bairnson had always observed to be true. At least Y'Gar was no different from any other officer in that respect.

Finally, Y'Gar seemed to steel himself enough to tell him.

"I've been given the opportunity to perform an ancient Yarzonian rite," said Y'Gar. "The Shal'Na."

"Retribution," Bairnson nodded.

Y'Gar's thin, upswept, branched eyebrows raised in response to her statement. "You know of it?"

Bairnson nodded once again. "A good captain always knows the customs of his officers. You never know when it may come in handy."

"I see," said Y'Gar, some astonishment still remaining in his tone. "Then you must also know that I am permitted to have one other person stand beside me in the rite."

"Yes," said Bairnson. "It's usually another Yarzonian isn't it?"

"Yes. But since I haven't been to Yarzon since I was born, I don't really know anyone there who would be willing to stand."

Y'Gar's words came as something of a surprise to Barinson. In the all the time he had known his first officer, he had never mentioned that he had never, in fact, visited the world of his origin. Then again, he'd only recently begun to open up to Bairnson and other bridge officers about details of his personal life.

"You've never been to Yarzon?" queried Bairnson.

Y'Gar shook his head perceptibly. "It's a long story, sir. But suffice it to say that I was taken from there as a foundling. I was raised on number of Federation colonies."

"Well then," said Barinson, reclining back into the cushions of his chair. "Who did you have in mind?"

Y'Gar sat silently a moment, almost as though he was afraid to tell him. However, Bairnson hoped that the expression on his face would convince him to do just that. Because it wouldn't disappear for anything else.

"One of the other officers," said Y'Gar finally. "I'd like Lieutenant Tieth, sir."

Slowly, calculatingly, Bairnson leaned forward, placing his hands on top of his desk. His expression one of shocked disbelief.

"Lieutenant Tieth?" he said incredulously.

Y'Gar nodded. Bairnson could hardly believe her ears, he was actually being serious!

"Y'Gar," Bairnson began slowly, "Lieutenant Tieth is..."

He paused a moment, trying to think of the most professional words to describe her. "...Presumptuous, pompous, opinionated..."

"And..." Y'Gar interrupted. "She is the only one who said 'yes.'"

Barinson continued to stare disbelievingly at Y'Gar. He had had a lot of trouble from Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth since her arrival aboard the *Enterprise*. Her half-Klingon, half-Vulcan heritage and personality had made it very difficult for anyone to work alongside her in engineering. Barinson had constantly received reports from Chief Engineer Ryan Johnson of how she was disrupting his engine room.

Trying to increase the overall destructive capability of the *Enterprise's* photon torpedoes. Wanting to standardize all phasers with a setting even higher than "kill." Between the two of them, Johnson and Bairnson had pulled enough hair out of their heads to effectively cover a small feline. And now it was Y'Gar, the most unlikely of all people, who was requesting her to join him.

"I suppose," Bairnson began again, "that's part of the tradition? The first person to accept stands beside you?"

"No," Y'Gar replied simply. "It's just that she was the *only* one I asked that accepted. Winston was too busy with ship's business and..."

Barinson noticed Y'Gar bite his lower lip. The look on his face comparable to if he had just accidentally swallowed an oversized insect.

"...Meaning no disrespect, sir. But Commander Sunset hasn't exactly been on her A-game recently," he continued.

Barinson nodded. He leaned in and rested his chin on his folded hands. "Between you and me," he said, softly. "We've been going through a bit of a rough patch, recently." Now it was

Y'Gar's turn to nod. He had noticed that the couple's relationship had strained since the *Enterprise's* previous mission to Dräkmar IV.

"And I'd greatly appreciate it," Bairnson began again, "if you would keep that information confidential."

Y'Gar nodded his compliance.

"I realize that might be difficult given your relationship with Saallak..."

"What 'relationship,' sir?" interrupted Y'Gar.

Bairnson sat back in his chair, seemingly in astonishment. "I know it's none of my business, but I know how close she and Sunset are..."

"Sir, whatever you may believe is going on between Lieutenant Saallak and me is nothing more than a shipwide rumor," said Y'Gar with finality.

Barinson sat silently a moment. He realized that, like so many other people on the *Enterprise* lately, he too had caught himself up in the rumor mill. He probably should have a confidential chat with his senior staff about such matters. However, another thought soon took the place of the slight guilt that he was experiencing.

"You didn't ask *me*," he said.

Y'Gar smiled diplomatically. "Believe me, sir; I had seriously considered asking you."

Barinson smiled contentedly at that remark.

"However," Y'Gar continued, "It doesn't make sense for the ship's top two officers to go gallivanting off on a matter of 'personal concerns.'"

Barinson nodded comprehendingly. He glanced down at his mug of barely touched tea and grabbed it. He raised the mug to his lips and took a slight swig of the light-brown liquid

contained within. After a satisfied sigh, he glanced up at Y'Gar once again.

"Do you know who Hikaru Sulu is?" he asked of Y'Gar.

Y'Gar's face expressed slight confusion. Apparently, he had not been anticipating that question. "He's... captain of the *Excelsior*, isn't he?"

Barinson nodded. "My former CO. Got me hooked on this stuff."

He raised his mug slightly, indicating the orange-blossom tea.

"The point is," Barinson continued, "that he once took the time to stand with one of his 'junior officers,' when they were called in to answer for crimes that their father had committed decades before."

Barinson observed Y'Gar's reaction. His brow furrowed deeply, almost causing his splintered eyebrows to merge together. Slowly but surely however, the message of his story was sinking in.

"Now, I'd like to think that I would do no less for one of my own officers," he said, punctuating the last few words. "Next time, don't jump to conclusions before you ask."

Y'Gar smiled. "No sir, I won't," he said shaking his head.

Bairnson nodded contently. "Permission granted. Have Mirgant and Winston take us as close to Yarzon as our current trajectory permits."

Y'Gar smiled as he rose from his seat and hurriedly dashed to the ready room's main door. Just as the doors parted to allow him onto the bridge, Barinson called out to him. He turned to face his captain.

"Good luck," he said.

Y'Gar smiled again, and with a quick nod of his head stepped sprightly through the open archway.

The *Enterprise* shuttlecraft, *Hawking II*, streaked its way across the star-speckled void of space at warp speed. In the pilot's console room, Y'Gar watched as Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth ran her long fingers artfully across her console, constantly making minor corrections to the ship's course.

Y'Gar sighed contentedly to himself. It had been four hours since the *Hawking II* had left the *Enterprise*—thanks in no small part to Marianne Ness—and in all that time, Y'Gar's young companion had not spoken a word. Outside of standard navigational banter.

In a way, Y'Gar felt grateful for the silence. It gave him a chance to think.

He glanced back over to the other pilot's console, and for the first time, took a long, hard look at Gael Mann Tieth. She was, by far, the most unusual-looking creature he had ever seen in his life. Dark brown skin, point-tipped ears, the distinctive cranial ridges of a Klingon. She moved her left hand from the console up to her neck and adjusted the collar of her department undershirt with her index finger.

Y'Gar snickered to himself. He had heard the stories of Tieth's discomfort with Starfleet uniforms, and of how she liked to spend her off-duty hours dressed in a more Klingon fashion. Personally, Y'Gar couldn't see the appeal of tight leather pants and metallic halter tops, but to each his, or her, own.

"Commander," said Tieth, her attention still focused straight ahead on the ship's navigation. "What exactly does one do when they're asked to 'stand beside' another in the Shal'Na?"

Y'Gar was taken slightly aback. *The first thing she says to me the entire trip, and it has to be that?* "Exactly what it sounds like," Y'Gar replied. "You will stand beside me as I present my

petition to the High Council, and grant assistance to me as I need it.”

Tieth nodded. Y’Gar presumed that that would be the extent of their conversation for the trip as she continued to stare straight ahead. However, Tieth surprised him by turning her seat to face him directly. For a moment, Y’Gar found himself taken by her slit-pupilled, red reptilian eyes. Must have had some Selayan in her background as well, Y’Gar thought.

For a moment, Y’Gar felt some comfort in the knowledge that there were, in fact, people in the universe more unusual than himself.

“Commander?” said Tieth.

Y’Gar shook his head with a slight smile. “No ranks here,” he said gently. “Just call me ‘Y’Gar.’”

Tieth inclined her head slightly at his request before continuing.

“Alright. Y’Gar. Would it be improper of me to ask: how were you granted this rite?”

Y’Gar sat silently a moment. He had told the story so many times that he thought it would have gotten easier by now.

But it hadn’t.

Now someone that he didn’t even know very well was asking him to tell her his life’s story. How did he win the right to perform the Shal’Na? The question itself was very simple to answer. It was just that the process of actually answering it caused Y’Gar no small amount of emotional pain.

“I was a baby,” Y’Gar began. “No more than a few months old. The village in which I was born was attacked and raided by an unknown enemy. My people fought bravely to protect their homes, but in the end their efforts were wasted.”

Gael Mann Tieth listened intently, hanging on every word as Y’Gar told the tale.

“Our houses were burned; our resources were pillaged, and our people were slaughtered... including my birth parents.”

“That’s horrible,” sighed Tieth, casting her eyes to the floor of the console room.

Y’Gar noticed her expression change from one of sympathy to one of slight befuddlement. She glanced up to look him in his green-on-green eyes again.

“How did you survive?” she wondered.

Y’Gar sighed. He sat in his chair, momentarily silent before continuing. “I don’t really know how the raiders missed me. By all accounts I should have died along with them.”

Tieth nodded. “So, what happened?”

Y’Gar turned his attention out the main window of the shuttlecraft, gazing at the stars passing by outside the ship as elongated white streaks.

“Someone found me,” he finally said. “A Federation trader named Marianne Heathcote. She had come to Yarzon hoping to exchange goods with some of the residents of my village. When she discovered the village destroyed, burnt-out hobbles of buildings, dead bodies littering the ground, it nearly broke her heart.”

“But then she found you?” queried Tieth.

“Yes. She found me wrapped in blankets inside one of those burnt-out houses. She took me in as her own.”

Again, Gael Mann Tieth shot Y’Gar a confused look. “Wouldn’t that have caused some problems with her superiors?”

“More than you’d realize!” said Y’Gar with a chuckle. “But Marianne had been told years before that, even with the latest advances in medical technology, she could never have children of her own.”

“So. You were her one chance for a son?”

Y’Gar nodded.

“What happened to her?” wondered Tieth.

“We travelled together until I was about five. Then she met a Federation ambassador named Geoffrey Ness. They fell in love, and a year later, they were married.”

“So, she eventually settled on being merely an ambassador’s wife,” said Tieth, a tiny amount of disgust in her voice.

“At first,” said Y’Gar, his tone quietly reprimanding Tieth. “But eventually she became an ambassador herself. Taking over most of Geoffrey’s duties when he died.”

Tieth seemed to appreciate that, at least, as a smile curled her lips. A slight tone began to emanate from Tieth’s console. It repeated itself over, and over again. Gael Mann Tieth turned her attention back to the console and ran her fingers across the top panel, confirming her data.

“We’re approaching the planet Yarzon,” reported Tieth.

Y’Gar glanced out the expansive window once more, and then he saw it. An ominous, gigantic reddish-orange orb slowly began to grow larger in size before Y’Gar’s eyes, blotting out the stars beyond. Y’Gar rapidly studied the planet from pole to pole, taking in the ice-covered, white polar regions, the upper, middle, and lower desert region, and the one gigantic blue sea near the equatorial region.

Yarzon. The world where Y’Gar had been born. And where he was about to visit for the very first time.

* * *

“What is next on the agenda?” the Advocate General called out.

A burly male bailiff, standing on the far side of the immense wooden bench stepped forward. He adjusted his grey uniform and cleared his throat slightly before addressing the immense crowd assembled in the Yarzonian High Council chamber.

“A petition, by Commander D’NadrY’Gar of the Federation starship, USS *Enterprise*,” said the bailiff in a presentational voice.

“To what end?” queried the Advocate General, diverting her attention to a notepad set before her on the bench.

“To sanction the rite of the Shal’Na,” said the bailiff.

The Advocate General raised her eyes from the notepad and glanced out among the assembly. A slight, but audible murmur had arisen from the crowd. The Advocate General grasped her gavel in her right hand and banged it several times. The force of the gavel’s wood striking the benchtop reverberated throughout the chamber, and within moments, the assembly was silent once again.

The Advocate General called for Y’Gar to step forward.

The tall chamber doors parted, flooding the room with a dull yellow light which briefly illuminated the dimly lit Council chamber. As the doors were closed and the assembly reaccustomed themselves to the dimness, Commander Y’Gar and Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth slowly began to step forward, approaching with the care the bench of the Advocate General.

Y’Gar glanced briefly around him as he walked. The assembly seats, which surrounded all three outer walls of the Council chamber, and also rose nearly fifteen feet above the floor, were filled almost to capacity with Yarzonian delegates.

As Y’Gar passed each row of assembled representatives as well as the odd spectators, he heard a murmur slowly begin and gradually rise, until it created the slightest of echoes within the chamber. He glanced once again in the direction of the Advocate General’s bench. As he gradually neared the almost-towering bench he noticed that the Advocate General had leaned over to address one of the other Advocates on either side of her seat.

Y'Gar felt a slight queasiness in his stomach. If they had been surprised by the petition to actually perform the Shal'Na, imagine how they must feel now that they knew it was being made by a man!

Y'Gar finally strode up to the bench just below the Advocate General. He glanced to his right to make sure that Tieth still stood beside him. In a matter of mere seconds, she too was there.

The Advocate General looked down at Y'Gar and Tieth, a quizzical look across her features. She shook her head slightly, not even ruffling her close-cropped, snow-white hair, the look in her green-on-green eyes, demonstrating nothing but contempt.

"Is this some sort of joke?" the Advocate General finally said. "The High Council is not about to waste any time on some trivial matter..."

"Madame Advocate," interrupted Y'Gar. "I can assure you that this is not a 'trivial matter'."

The Advocate General sat back in her chair. Apparently, Y'Gar's stern tone had convinced her to at least listen to what he had to say.

"Who, or should I say what, is your companion?" asked the Advocate General, her tone still haughty.

Gael Mann Tieth told the Advocate General her name.

"And what is her function here?"

"She is whom I have chosen to stand beside me in the Shal'Na," said Y'Gar.

A roar of disapproval erupted from the assembly. Y'Gar and Tieth simultaneously whirled around to observe the startled, and even angered, faces of the assembly's members. Finally, they heard the Advocate General gavel for silence once again. The pair turned to face her.

“The rules of the Shal’Na,” the Advocate General began again, “state that the one who stands must be of Yarzonian descent.”

“The rules also state,” said Y’Gar, “that the final decision belongs to the individual. I have made my decision, and Gael Mann Tieth will stand!”

Y’Gar was half expecting another eruption of disapproving shouts from the assembly. Whether it had been the strength of his own words, or a look of warning from the Advocate General, he didn’t know, but in any case, the assembly remained silent.

“Very well,” said the Advocate General. “Present your petition.”

Y’Gar bowed slightly to the Advocate General before turning to address the entire assembly. His heart was racing, and he could feel tiny beads of sweat forming on his brow. He couldn’t tell if it was the oppressive heat of the room or his own nervous tension that caused these reactions. However, he had to continue and present his case.

“Twenty-five years ago,” Y’Gar began, his voice echoing throughout the chamber. “The village of Joral was mercilessly, and without warning, attacked by a renegade band of nomadic tribesmen from the southern desert province of Tanbul.”

Y’Gar paced the floor, hammering home key points of his speech to either the Advocates’ bench or whichever assemblywoman or man was closest to him.

“They pillaged the resources which Joral had worked so hard to achieve. They raped and slaughtered every man, woman, and child. And, as if that weren’t enough, they then proceeded to burn the entire town to the ground.”

He paused. Y’Gar glanced around at the assembly yet again. From the small sampling of the looks on their faces, he could tell that were indeed listening.

"The name and the honor of the people of Joral has been bloodied, stained, and left to rot in the heat of our twin suns!" said Y'Gar. "It must be restored. I therefore ask the Council to grant me, the lone survivor of the village of Joral, the right to perform the Shal'Na!"

Y'Gar paced back to where he had begun his speech, standing before the Advocate General's bench. Gael Mann Tieth had remained in her place, and as he stood beside her, she gave him a smile of approval.

The Advocate General produced a piece of yellow, dog-eared parchment from underneath the tiny pile which sat atop her bench. She briefly skimmed its contents before looking down at Y'Gar and Tieth again.

"According to our records," began the Advocate General, "you were liberated from that village when you were no more than six months old."

"That is correct, Madame Advocate."

"Since that time, you have either lived on any number of Federation trading vessels or the planet Earth. You have served as an officer in Starfleet for the last five years, and in all that time, you have never once visited the world of your origin."

Y'Gar stood outwardly confident. Inside, he had absolutely no idea what the Advocate General was leading up to.

"Now," the Advocate General began again, "some twenty-five years later, you have come back to seek justice for a group of people whom you could not possibly even have any memories of, let alone any connection to. Now I ask you, why should I grant what you want?"

Y'Gar cast his eyes downward. The Advocate General had a point. Anything he had ever known about who he was and where he came from, had been told to him by his mother—an Earth woman. A Federation trader was really the only connection that

Y'Gar had with his heritage. He couldn't remember what his natural parents even looked like. Were they good? Were they a happy couple?

Y'Gar simply did not know.

He was prepared to speak up and admit that the wisdom of that Advocate General was sounder than even he realized. But that was when Gael Mann Tieth decided to speak.

"Madame Advocate," she said. "Look at this man." She indicated Y'Gar. "He is one of you! I look around and all I that I see are people with the same eyes, the same hearts, the same passions as this man."

Tieth turned to address the assembly. "I know what it's like be of two worlds, and yet not fully belong to either of them. This man may have been raised to the ways of Earth. But his heart, his mind, and his soul are of Yarzon." Tieth turned to address the Advocate General once again. "Don't deny him what is rightfully his."

Tieth laid a hand on Y'Gar's shoulder. He glanced up into her eyes, mentally thanking her for her words. Even if he wasn't sure that he believed them himself.

The Advocate General leaned back in her chair and spoke privately with two of the other Advocates. She exchanged words with one, and then the other for a moment before glancing back down at Y'Gar and Tieth.

"The Council will consider your petition," said the Advocate General. "You are dismissed, for now. She who stands beside you will remain and inform you when we have made our decision."

Y'Gar glanced briefly at Tieth, who nodded reassuringly. He then marched with some precision up the aisle towards the tall Chamber doors. They opened briefly, again flooding the room with a dull, yellow glow and when they closed, Y'Gar was gone.

Deep, greenish-grey, and somewhat foreboding.

Y'Gar struggled through the murky, dark abyss for several moments. It was too dim to see anything too far ahead, so Y'Gar contented himself that he could at least make out his own, semi-naked form. Finally, he tensed every muscle in his body and with one great motion, thrust himself high above.

Y'Gar's head broke the surface of the water and he inhaled deeply, filling his lungs with the warm, salty air of the sea. As he bobbed about in the swell of the waves, he glanced at the sandy shore onto which the waves were crashing.

It was late in the day, and most of the regular visitors to Yarzon's only large body of water had returned to their bungalow retreats for the evening. Y'Gar himself even began to notice that the air itself was slightly cooler than when he had arrived two hours ago.

Y'Gar twisted his body around to glance towards the eastern horizon. Yarzon's larger sun, K'Var, had already sunk below the horizon, and the bright, smaller sun Pr'vat, would soon join its heavenly companion. Y'Gar decided to ride the waves in to shore, like he had done in Earth's oceans years ago as a boy.

As the final, strong swell washed Y'Gar's body onto the sandy shore, he slowly opened his eyes; making certain that the high salt content of the water would not sting his eyes. Finally, Y'Gar opened his green-on-green eyes and noticed a pair of black-booted feet standing before him at eye level.

His eyes followed the line of the boots' owner's legs up, past her waist, her chest, and finally to her familiar brown, ridged face.

"Having fun?" queried Gael Mann Tieth with slight sarcasm.

Y'Gar rose from the damp, reddish-orange sand and strode over to his towel which lay a few feet away from where Tieth

was standing. Her eyes followed him as he plucked the large, bluish towel from the sand, shook off the excess particles that still stuck to it, and begin to dry off his dripping body.

“Well,” Tieth began again, “while you’ve been here swimming with the dolphins, I’ve had to stay in a hot, stuffy room listening to lot of cackling old women discuss political ramifications, and tradition violations, and I-don’t-know-what-else, all afternoon.”

Y’Gar began to vigorously rub the towel across his head, trying to dry, at least to some extent, his long, dark locks. Tieth slowly began to approach him.

“On top of which,” she continued, “I had to go back to the shuttlecraft because of some minor problem with the navigational computers, which I fixed, thank you very much.”

Y’Gar then reached down to pick up a red-colored tank top which had been placed at the apex of the towel before he actually jumped into the water. He pulled the shirt over his head until it formed itself comfortably around his chest. Finally, he stuck his thin, lightly muscled arms through the appropriate holes of the top.

Tieth looked at him quizzically. “Have you heard a word I’ve just said?”

“There are no dolphins on Yarzon,” said Y’Gar simply. “Mekurt would be the closest comparison.”

Tieth rolled her eyes. She sighed exasperatingly.

“What did the Council have to say?”

“More than I care to hear in an afternoon,” spat Tieth.

Y’Gar shot her a cross look.

“Okay, okay,” said Tieth raising her hands, “I know, respect for other planets’ customs. But why do they have to be so damned argumentative?”

“Politicians are the same on any planet,” smiled Y’Gar.

That seemed to perk Tieth up a little bit. She cast her eyes to the ground as if trying to hide her snicker from Y'Gar. However, the sharp eyes of the *Enterprise* first officer wouldn't have missed it for the universe.

Tieth finally brought her gaze up to meet his. The expression on her face changed, becoming much more businesslike.

"They've given you sanctioning to perform the Shal'Na," she said. "We leave for Tanbul tonight."

Y'Gar inhaled deeply. He felt his pulse race with excitement. After twenty-five years, it was time for the people of Joral to receive their retribution!

Desert.

An endlessly vast sea of sand stretched far to the horizon, broken up only by the odd, brown rock islands which jutted upward from the orangish sand. No sound could be heard, except for the light breeze that slowly shaped and changed the contours of the dunes, like a lump of clay under the experienced, graceful hands of a potter. The heat rising from the sand shimmered in the brightness of the cloudless sky overhead.

Y'Alnac sighed.

The heat was sweltering, oppressive. Even more so than was usual for this time of year in the province. He rubbed his green-on-green eyes with his thumb and forefinger, and then wiped the sweat from his brow with his bare arm.

Lookout duty was, by no means, the most pleasant assignment in the community. The hours seemed to stretch into days because of the relentless heat, and very often, all that there ever was to be seen were the tiny dust devils which often blew across the plain.

Y'Alnac sighed yet again.

He glanced down to just above his breastbone. The light-grey gathering bottle hung securely in its place on his chest. Y'Alnac reached down and clamped his hand around it. A gasp of contentment escaped his lips, and Y'Alnac hungrily unclamped the gathering bottle from his orange-brown tunic.

It had been hours since he had been able to take even a sip from the tiny container. Y'Alnac had gambled that if he waited long enough, the gathering bottle would collect enough moisture from both the atmosphere and his own perspiration, to provide a long, healthy drink.

He had been right.

The light-grey container had been filled to the top, and Y'Alnac eagerly removed the tiny, circular cap from atop the bottle. With a satisfied smile, he raised the gathering bottle to lips and guzzled its moist contents. The water felt cool and clean as it trickled slightly down his cheeks, and graciously poured down his throat.

Y'Alnac removed the gathering bottle from his mouth and just as he was about to take another full, satisfying swallow, he noticed a dust cloud on the horizon, tiny at first, but eventually growing larger and larger. Y'Alnac quietly began to panic. Now was not the best time for a sandstorm to hit, and Y'Alnac wasn't sure if his words of warning would get the members of the community to safe shelter in time.

Fortunately, he discovered, much to his relief, that such an alert would be unnecessary, as the cause of the dust cloud slowly came into view. It was a shanty cart, thrown together with whatever materials could be found. Differently colored pieces of cloth covered the cart's framework to protect its contents from the harshness of the Yarzonian desert.

As the cart came closer, Y'Alnac noticed that it was being drawn by a single, aged, three-humped karakned which occasionally bellowed in protest to the burden it had been strapped to. *Poor animal*, thought Y'Alnac.

The cart came closer still, and Y'Alnac could make out a solitary figure sitting on a rotted piece of wood situated at the front of the cart, holding the karakned's reins. The figure whipped the reins every few seconds, urging the animal onwards, his head and much of the rest of his body covered by faded, ratty, brown cloth.

Y'Alanc stepped forward, drawing his ceremonial scimitar as the cart was brought to a halt before the large metallic gate he guarded. Y'Alnac tensed himself for combat as the figure leapt

from his position on the cart and slowly approached. Y'Alnac swallowed hard. He was hoping that he didn't have to use the heavy sword that was always given to the lookout, but with this strange figure coming to an isolated community like his, Y'Alnac had to be ready for anything.

Y'Alnac released some of the tension from his body as the figure reached up and removed the hood which had been obscuring his face. The stranger's face was not unlike Y'Alnac's at all. It seemed young, and not at all weatherbeaten. His eyebrows gracefully swept up from his brow and branched out below the end of each green-on-green eye as neatly as if some artist had painted them onto his face.

The figure smiled gracefully at Y'Alnac, and he returned the gesture gratefully.

"Good day, my dear boy," said the stranger.

Dear boy indeed, thought Y'Alnac. *We're not that far apart in age.*

"Can you tell me if I've reached the province of Tanbul?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," said Y'Alnac, trying to sound as firm as possible. "Who are you and what is your business here?"

The stranger smiled again, this time like a stage performer when the spotlight was on them. "I," he said, "am Y'Gar. A humble trader, at your service."

With sweeping, flowing movements of his arm, the stranger, who had referred to himself as Y'Gar, stepped back to his cart. "I have traversed this galaxy from one end to the other, bringing back the rarest, most exotic treasures you will ever find anywhere. Observe!"

Y'Gar reached inside his cart and produced a tiny, tan cloth pouch. With a flurry of movement, he untied the string sealing

the cloth, revealing a beautiful, purple, crystalline gemstone. With a gleam in his eye, Y'Gar presented it to Y'Alnac.

"A piece of Deltan starfire," said the trader. "One of the rarest and most highly prized gems in the galaxy. The Deltans believe that if you hold it up to the light, you can see your own destiny within its crystalline matrix. Or...!"

Y'Gar swept back to the cart once again, this time producing a large, oddly shaped glass bottle. Inside the bottle swirled an orange liquid. He brought the bottle forward, presenting it to Y'Alnac.

"Saurian brandy," said Y'Gar. "The most sought-after beverage in the galaxy!"

"We can get Saurian brandy anywhere!" said Y'Alnac, barely containing his enthusiasm.

"Ah, but not like this, my friend! This brandy was originally made during the reign of Emperor Sslaar XIV, which makes it nearly two... *hundred...* years... *old!!*"

Y'Alnac's mouth was watering and he didn't care who noticed. Even if this trader was trying to sucker him, Saurian brandy tasted fifty times better than water produced from a gathering bottle. Y'Alnac was about to make Y'Gar an offer when his gaze was averted back to the cart. Something had emerged from inside it.

Y'Alnac studied the new stranger from toe to head. It was obviously female, but its deep brown skin tone, ridged forehead, and red, reptilian eyes were completely alien to Y'Alnac. Nevertheless, he was intrigued by the creature's exquisite beauty. The tiny amount of clothing she wore accentuated her figure in all the right places.

Y'Gar glanced to the cart and then back to Y'Alnac, nearly catching him wiping a drop of drool from his mouth. "And... what... is this?" Y'Alnac gaped.

“Ah,” said Y’Gar, “the rarest treasure of all. A unique specimen found on a tiny jungle asteroid. Raised in the wild and brought back to civilization, where she has grown quite eager to... please.”

“Please?” said Y’Alnac shooting a glance at Y’Gar. “In what way... please?”

Y’Gar leaned in and whispered in a conspiratorial manner, “In any way you can imagine!”

Y’Alnac smiled excitedly and glanced back to the cart. The scantily clad wildwoman, eager to learn the ways of civilization was every man’s fantasy. Even in a matriarchal society like Yarzon’s. Y’Alnac had to have her.

“What,” he began somewhat nervously, “what is her...price if I wished to purchase her?”

“Oh, my friend,” said Y’Gar somewhat disquietingly. “She is veeerrrry expensive. After all, she is one of a kind.”

“Please, tell me!”

“Well,” said Y’Gar, pacing back towards the cart, his finger thoughtfully placed on his chin. “What can you offer me in trade?”

Y’Alnac pondered for a moment. As he did, he could have sworn that the wildwoman shot Y’Gar an icy look before directing her attention forward once again. “I have a large herd of bovines, and a ranchhouse with close to 2 metrics of fertile land,” Y’Alnac finally said.

“How many head of bovine?” said Y’Gar.

“Nearly 30.”

“Oh!” Y’Gar cried out, seemingly in agony. He turned to face Y’Alnac again, a look of sorrow across his youthful features.

“I’m sorry,” he said honestly, “but that is slightly *less* than what I was hoping to get for her.”

Y'Alnac's shoulders drooped disappointedly. Y'Gar patted him sympathetically on the back. A moment later, he reached into his cloak and produced the tiny Deltan starfire gem he had presented Y'Alnac earlier. He placed it gently in Y'Alnac's hands.

"For such a grand attempt at haggling, please accept this small gift. Free of charge."

Y'Alnac glanced up into Y'Gar's eyes and smiled contentedly.

"Now my friend," said Y'Gar. "Do you suppose that there is anyone in this community of yours that perhaps could purchase her? Or any other of my treasures? Perhaps, your leader for example?"

"Yes!" said Y'Alnac with newfound excitement. "I'm sure that our leader would be interested! Come, follow me."

Y'Alnac hurriedly paced over to a lever situated in the stone wall which surrounded the community. He pulled the lever down and the large, metallic gate slowly began to rise. Y'Gar jumped up into the driver's position of his cart as the gate continued to rise upward, seemingly into the very heart of the stone wall itself, until finally it had left enough space for the cart to pull through into the community.

Y'Alnac quickly placed the lever up again and signalled for Y'Gar to maneuver the cart to within the confines of the community's guard wall.

* * *

Y'Gar whipped the reins rhythmically every few seconds, making sure that the old nag of a karakned the Advocates had given him would pull the cart the extra few more feet needed. As he sat trying to take in the scenery of the vast community, Gael Mann Tieth stuck her head out from behind the flap in the tarp covering the cart.

"I do not appreciate this role which you have cast me in!" she hissed in Y'Gar's ear.

"Relax, Tieth," said Y'Gar conspiratorially. "Think of it as career advancement."

Tieth huffed disgustedly to herself and Y'Gar shot her a very satisfied smile. He then cocked his head, indicating that she should stick her own back inside the cart before anyone noticed. She did, grudgingly.

Y'Gar chuckled to himself as he surveyed the community. It was larger than he had expected and seemed to spread out all around him for at least fifty metrics. Possibly more, but without the aid of a tricorder, Y'Gar couldn't be certain.

Everything was there that should have been. Small, thatched dwellings on the lower flatlands, larger adobes set into the cliff at the far end of the village, which served double duty as part of the wall surrounding the community. Wells placed at strategic points throughout the community, most of them surrounded at the moment by people who glanced up curiously as Y'Gar's cart passed by.

But then, Y'Gar noticed something he had not been expecting to see at all.

Fertile land.

It had to have stretched out at least fifteen metrics. Fallow fields blooming with green grass and every sort of vegetable-bearing plant that could imaginably grow in Yarzon's hot, dry climate. And in the middle of the unlikely paradise in the desert sat a huge, glass building. It was shaped in many ways like an old aircraft hangar, and the multi-colored panes of glass reflected the light of Yarzon's twin suns in a rainbow of colors.

This seemed to be where the young lookout who had met Y'Gar at the gate was taking him. For some inexplicable reason Y'Gar could not help but be impressed. A Garden of Eden, in

one of Yarzón's largest and most inhospitable deserts. It had to be one of the "wonders of the universe" that Starfleet recruiting posters always talked about.

"Is this where we'll find this Haver... Hever..." Gael Mann Teith called out from inside the cart.

"H'VratY'Tan," said Y'Gar correcting her.

"Whatever. Is this where we'll find him?"

"I don't know for sure. Tanbul is one of the largest provinces on Yarzón."

"Well, I certainly hope so!" said Tieth. "If it ever gets back to the *Enterprise* that you and I were seen together with me dressed like an Orion prostitute, I'll never forgive you!"

"I promise, I'll only show the holophotos to my closest friends," said Y'Gar with a grin.

"What?!" screeched Tieth poking her head out from behind the flap once again.

Y'Gar eyed her somewhat disappointedly. "Y'know, Tieth, you really should learn to develop a sense of humor. You might enjoy it."

"I've got a sense of humor," said Tieth defensively.

"Alright, then. Tell me a joke."

Tieth sat silently a moment. Probably trying to remember the last good one she'd heard. Finally, she said, "How can you mix Klingons together with Romulans and Gorn?"

Y'Gar shrugged his shoulders.

"You chop 'em up and put 'em in a blender!"

Y'Gar shot Tieth a horrified glare. "That's disgusting! Not to mention morbid."

"Yeah, but you gotta admit, it's a riot!"

Y'Gar motioned for Tieth to go back inside the cart. The wry smile curling her lips faded as she slunk back inside. Y'Gar shook his head at Tieth's poor attempt at humor.

“Y’Gar,” she called out again. Y’Gar winced at the sound of her voice but bade her to continue.

“When meet this Hiv... Hav..”

“H’VratY’Tan.”

“Yeah, him. What do we... by the way, why is his name longer than yours?”

“It’s Yarzonian custom for members of a ruling house to attach their house’s name to their own.”

“Oh,” said Tieth, realization dawning in in her voice. “So that means that his real name is...?”

“Y’Tan,” said Y’Gar. “Now, what were you asking before?”

“What do we do when we actually meet him?”

“That depends on him,” said Y’Gar, a grim look crossing his usually impassive features.

* * *

Y’Gar pulled back hard on the reins, bringing the aged karakned and his cart to a halt. The lookout had led him to a tiny garden, abloom with differently colored tiny flowers. He called up to Y’Gar asking him to wait, before trotting up a small dirt path until his features obscured into a blur of brown.

Y’Gar squinted as another brownish blur suddenly appeared next to the lookout. Obviously, this new blur had been someone who had been stooping on the ground a moment ago. Probably tending the flowers or something. Y’Gar was expecting the two shapes to then disappear for a while and then return a few moments later. Accompanied by a third blur who would obviously be the community leader.

However, to Y’Gar’s great astonishment, the two blurs began to approach the cart.

As their features became clearer and clearer, Y’Gar could make out that the young lookout was in the company of a much older man. His face was wrinkled not only by the passage of

time, but also by living in the wind-whipped sand of the deep desert all his life. The top of his head had long since ceased to grow any hair, however from the sides and back of it flowed a generously long crop of snow-white locks, pulled into a ponytail at the rear.

The old man wore an orange/brown tunic, similar to both the lookout's and the one which Y'Gar himself had been wearing underneath his ratty robes. His arms still possessed a rugged, muscular structure, and his green-on-green eyes still shone with the fire of youthful exuberance.

Y'Gar leapt down from the cart and approached the lookout and his older companion. Y'Gar bowed slightly in greeting and respect, and the old man returned the gesture.

"This is our leader," said the lookout.

Y'Gar raised his eyebrows in feigned surprise.

"Oh, don't look so shocked, young man," said the older Yarzonian pleasantly. "I'm often here at this time of day, looking after my gardens."

"You lead this community?" said Y'Gar, the shock of his voice disguising his true feelings. "I was expecting..."

"A woman?" said the old man. He chuckled slightly before continuing. "I suppose it's been a while since you've visited Yarzon, hasn't it?"

Y'Gar nodded. That, at least, was true.

"It's becoming more and more commonplace for men to lead their communities," the old man explained. "In fact, you might say I was sort of a pioneer in that respect."

"H'VratY'Tan has been leading our community since his early years," said the lookout, beaming proudly.

"Oh, do be quiet, boy!" said the old man with embarrassment. He leaned in closer to Y'Gar and whispered, "My son is a good man, but he does tend to talk too much about

his old father. I don't know how he's ever going to make on his own merits!"

Y'Gar shot the young lookout a surprised glance. "You mean, you're..."

"H'VratY'Alnac, at your service, sir," said the lookout with a slight bow.

Y'Gar eyed the young lookout curiously. Finally, he smiled and said, "If I'd known that, I would've given you a better deal!"

"Which is precisely why he didn't tell you," said H'VratY'Tan. "Now then, I understand you're interested in trade. Is that right?"

Y'Gar nodded.

"Well then, let's not beat around the bush. Show me the most valuable thing that you have!"

Y'Gar bowed slightly in acknowledgement and dashed back to the cart. He opened the cloth flap and called for Gael Mann Tieth to come out. As seductively as she could, she slowly emerged from inside the cart, making sure that the old man got a good look at every part of her.

Y'Gar glanced worriedly up at her and back towards Y'Tan. He didn't want her to overdo it. The last thing he wanted to give Y'Tan was a heart attack. However, the old man watched the whole seduction routine with amazing control and impassivity. After a few moments, Y'Gar came back over to Y'Tan and his son.

"What do you think, Father?" asked Y'Alnac excitedly.

"Yes, very nice," admitted the old man. "I suppose I could use some companionship in my autumn years."

Y'Tan faced Y'Gar directly. "Alright, what are you asking for her?"

"He turned down thirty head of bovine, Father," said Y'Alnac.

"I see," said Y'Tan, placing his forefinger on his chin. He thought silently to himself for a moment, as Y'Gar stood by, silently watching.

"I think I can offer you something better than bovines," said the old man proudly. "Come."

Y'Tan crooked his index finger, indicating that Y'Gar should follow him. Y'Gar shot a quick glance back at Tieth and trotted after the old man, who had started walking up the path towards the huge, hanger-like, glass building. He slowed down to a brisk walk as he caught up with Y'Tan.

The pair strode up to the glass doors of the building. Y'Gar looked up taking in the near-towering height to which the structure rose. The light of the twin suns in the sky was partially blocked by the building's metal framework, but it still shone brightly through in a kaleidoscope of color. Y'Tan pushed the doors inwardly and motioned for Y'Gar to follow him inside.

The interior of the building turned out to be the largest arboretum Y'Gar had ever seen in his life.

Even larger than the one on the *Enterprise*, it stretched outward from the doors for at least half a metric. The four dirt pathways which divided the area of the interior were lined with all varieties of plant-life. There were Yucca-like trees which towered nearly to the roof of the building, vines with grapelike fruit as thick as the trunk of an Earth sequoia tree, and flowers of such exotic color combinations and immense sizes that Y'Gar felt as if he had shrunk to only six inches tall.

Y'Tan had started down the third dirt pathway as Y'Gar stood in awe of the arboretum, and Y'Gar quickly dashed after him once he had taken in enough of the breathtaking spectacle. He finally caught up with the old man just as he was about to

stop before a small patch of regular-sized, orange-yellow, lily-like flowers, which sprouted upwards on thick, thorny green stems from a base of rich, black dirt.

Y'Tan made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "What do you think?"

"You did all this?" said Y'Gar with awe.

"My life's work," nodded Y'Tan. "Everything in this room is a treasure to me. But I think you'll find these flowers the most interesting."

Y'Tan indicated the patch of thorny-stemmed lilies which sat before them. Y'Gar leaned down and inspected them more carefully. "I don't suppose you recognize them, do you?" said Y'Tan.

Y'Gar's green-on-green eyes squinted as he studied one of the orange-yellow flowers more closely. Slowly, his eyes widened, and his jaw dropped. He felt his heartrate increase as his excitement mounted. It was unbelievable! He had to close his eyes, rub the lids, and open them wide again to make sure that he wasn't imagining the whole thing.

"This is a hadecolius!" gasped Y'Gar.

A smile crossed Y'Tan's face as he nodded.

"I... I just don't believe it!" Y'Gar continued. "These were thought to be extinct!"

"Yes, they were," said Y'Tan. "But in the course of my travels, I once came across a single flower blooming in the desert. Almost as if it didn't know it wasn't supposed to be there. I dug it out of the ground and brought it back here. Hoping that I could cultivate it in some way."

"I'd say you were successful!" said Y'Gar shaking his head disbelievingly. "How many others know about this?"

“You’re the first. I’ve been waiting for someone to come along who truly understood the significance of this flower. Do you think there are others out there with your keen sensitivity?”

Y’Gar nodded. It was all he could do.

“Then, here,” said Y’Tan. He reached down and plucked a tiny shovel from the dirt. He then crouched to the dirt path, where Y’Gar noticed a stack of small, orange porcelain pots. Y’Tan plucked one from the top of the stack and brought it up to the level of the flowers. He took the shovel and began digging around one of the lily-like blooms.

“Take this one as a token of our mutual appreciation of beauty,” said Y’Tan as he dug. “Take it and show it to the rest of the galaxy as a symbol that there are still people who value life above war and selfish political interests.”

Y’Gar nodded. He then began to pace in a circle, taking in more of the lush vegetation of the arboretum as the old man dug. Finally, he turned and faced the back of the still-digging Y’Tan.

“It’s funny that you should mention that,” said Y’Gar.

“What?” said the old man, glancing up briefly from his endeavor.

“Valuing life above selfish political interests.”

“Why do you say that?”

Y’Gar paced away from the old man for a moment before turning to face him again. “I’ve heard stories about you, Y’Tan.”

“Really?” said the old man with a chuckle. “What do they say?”

“When you called yourself a pioneer in male leadership, you weren’t doing yourself justice. They say that you were once a fierce warrior. That you showed no mercy to your enemies. Or to anyone else who stood in your way.”

Y'Gar began to slowly pace back to the old man, who was now placing a freshly dug hadecolius into the orange, clay pot along with a healthy helping of black soil.

"That's how you came to be the leader of this community," Y'Gar continued. "By leading a revolt which overthrew the old leaders and put you in charge. You then led this community to a life of barbaric plundering. Taking what you needed from others, rather than producing it for yourself."

Y'Tan turned and faced Y'Gar, a gentle smile across his weathered, aged face. "That was a whole other lifetime ago."

"So, you don't deny it?" said Y'Gar, his voice betraying none of the anger he felt in his heart.

"You weren't there, my boy. You weren't even born. You have no idea what it was like," said Y'Tan gently. "The old leaders were...vile, corrupt. They took everything we made for themselves and left next to nothing for us. They worked us to death and kept demanding more and more from us to keep their loathsome, fat, purulent bodies in the standard of living to which they had grown accustomed! Something had to be done!"

"But," said Y'Gar, vainly trying to disguise his sudden shock, "what about the raids on other villages? The countless lives your people slaughtered?"

"What would you have had us do? The people were weak and angry. They had been left with nothing. We were desperate, and any talk of starting over was shouted down. The people wanted action, not more promises to be broken."

Y'Tan turned back to the pot with a shake of his head. He placed more soil into it and gently patted it down.

"There was no other way," he said.

Finally, Y'Tan seemed to stop patting down the soil. He turned back to face Y'Gar and handed him the hadecolius. Y'Gar took the pot in his hands and cradled it at his side with

one hand. The old man looked at Y'Gar somewhat sadly. Had these acts of violence in the past been as painful to him as they had to Y'Gar? He was beginning to wonder.

“Now,” began Y'Tan, “my only ambition is to see the desert bloom again, before I die. That's why I've built all this. Perhaps because, in some small way, I hope to make up for all the death I've caused.”

Y'Tan took Y'Gar by his arm and began to lead him towards the glass doors.

The towering chamber doors opened, flooding the immense room briefly with a dull yellow glow. As the doors closed behind them, Commander Y'Gar and Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth strode down the narrow aisle towards the high bench of the Advocates. Y'Gar glanced briefly around him as the assembled throng once more erupted into a low murmur.

Y'Gar smoothed the wrinkles out of his maroon Starfleet uniform top and glanced back to Tieth, ensuring that hers was as presentable as his. Finally, Y'Gar and Tieth stopped before the towering bench of the Advocates. The pair turned their attention skyward to the stony gazes of the three Advocates.

The Advocate General raised her gavel and brought it crashing down upon the top of the bench. The sound of the gavel's strike reverberated throughout the chamber. She brought it down two more times, until the chamber was silent once again. Satisfied that there would be no more outbursts, she gently rested the gavel on the bench before her. Then, she turned her attention to the two officers from the *Enterprise*.

"Y'Gar," she said, her voice bouncing off the stony walls of the immense Council chamber. "It has been nearly a week since you departed for the province of Tanbul. Did you find the one you seek?"

"Yes, Madame Advocate," said Y'Gar.

"And what have you to report?"

Y'Gar stood silently for a moment. He bit his lower lip while his mind raced to come up with an answer for the Advocate. He glanced over to Gael Mann Tieth who stood silently by, with an impassive expression on her face. *Just like a true Klingon*, Y'Gar thought.

"Y'Gar!"

The forceful tone of the Advocate General's voice snapped his attention back to her. She leaned her head lower and repeated her question. Y'Gar noted that she made a point to articulate each word.

"The Shal'Na is ended," Y'Gar said finally.

The Advocate General leaned back in her seat as another murmur erupted from the assembly. She raised her hand high above her head, calling for silence. The throng quickly complied.

"I see," said the Advocate General. "Tell me, what did you find when you reached Tanbul?"

Y'Gar cast his eyes to the dirt floor for a moment, gathering his thoughts. A moment later, he gazed back up into the eyes of the Advocate General.

"I saw a community," he began, "rich in vegetation and water. The people were safe, happy, and contented. They want for nothing. It was a... paradise in the middle of the desert."

The Advocate General nodded. "And what did you see when you met H'VratY'Tan?"

"I saw an old man, weary from the hardships of a long and bitter life. A man whom I imagined to be cold, heartless, and evil."

"And was this not so?" wondered the Advocate General.

"No! It was not," said Y'Gar with passion. "This man had been a... a husband, a father! With his own hands he had built one of the largest botanical gardens I had ever seen. And he cared for every root, every leaf; every flower that grew in this garden."

"Was this not the same man who massacred your village all those years ago?"

Y'Gar stood silently a moment. This had been true what the Advocate General was saying. This was the same man who, all

his life, Y'Gar had carried a bitter hatred for. Had he been some stereotypically ruthless warlord, Y'Gar would have felt justified and somewhat sated in his feelings.

But Y'Tan had not been that way.

The Y'Tan that Y'Gar had met could have been his own father. At least, that was how Y'Gar had often imagined his birth father would be. A kindly, wizened old man who filled the remaining days of his life with tending a beautiful garden which grew on his homeland. The Advocate General had spoken the truth, but Y'Gar had discovered the greater truth.

"I really don't know he may have been," Y'Gar said after a moment. "The world was different then. Perhaps, a man, or a woman, needed to be ruthless and cunning in order to survive."

Y'Gar turned and faced the assembled throng.

"Who among you can honestly say, that if push came to shove, they would not fight, even kill, to secure a better way of life for their people? And a legacy for their children?"

Y'Gar faced the Advocates' bench.

"The Y'Tan I saw had done just that!" Y'Gar spoke with forceful conviction. "Given his people a future where they would face no famine, no hunger."

Y'Gar paused momentarily, letting his words sink into the minds of the Advocates and the assembly.

"The ends may not justify the means," he then added. "But I'm satisfied with them."

The Advocate General shot a puzzled look between her two compatriots. For a moment, Y'Gar watched as the Advocates exchanged words between them whose meaning Y'Gar could only speculate. The Advocate General then returned her attention to Y'Gar. "What did you do with Y'Tan?" she finally asked.

"Nothing," said Y'Gar simply.

“Nothing?” repeated the Advocate General, her voice rising in astonishment.

“I will not kill an old man.”

The Advocate General turned once again to each of her compatriots as a roar of disapproval erupted from the assembly. Y’Gar swallowed hard as he watched the three Advocates carry on a conversation that was drowned out to his ears by the cacophony of the crowd.

As the roars of protest from the assembly grew louder and louder, Y’Gar glanced back at Gael Mann Tieth. Apparently, the roar had taken her by surprise as well, and she crouched like a tiger, ready to pounce on an unsuspecting prey. The expression on her face revealed the fear she must have felt inside. It wasn’t typical for a Klingon to show fear to an enemy, but with the way the crowd was acting, Y’Gar couldn’t say that he blamed her for being scared.

He had no idea what was going to happen next. And even less idea if he and Tieth would be ready to face it.

Fortunately, moments later, he heard the banging of the Advocate General’s gavel. The repeated pounding of the gavel on the Advocates’ wooden desk became louder and louder as the ruckus from the crowd slowly subsided. Finally, a single bang! reverberated throughout the chamber, and all was silent once again.

The Advocate General rose from her seat, giving a full view of regal, blue robes. “Bring him in!” she called.

Y’Gar and Tieth whirled around as the tall doors to the chamber opened, once again filling the room momentarily with light. As the doors closed, Y’Gar could make out three figures walking down the aisle towards the Advocates’ bench. As the trio came closer, Y’Gar could make out two burly bailiffs in grey tunics on either side of a smaller, thinner figure.

As they finally approached the bench, Y'Gar's jaw dropped.

Standing in between the two bailiffs, his arms and legs shackled in metallic manacles, was the wispy form of H'VratY'Tan. Y'Gar's eyes followed the trio as they finally stopped before the Advocates' bench. With a wave of her hand, the Advocate General dismissed the two bailiffs, who departed into the shadowy corners of the Council chamber.

Y'Tan turned his head to face Y'Gar. The anguished look on his wrinkled face made Y'Gar's heart sink to the pit of his stomach. Y'Tan looked Y'Gar over from head to toe, probably taking in the fact that he was now wearing a Starfleet uniform.

"Why?" Y'Tan sadly rasped.

"H'VratY'Tan," boomed the voice of the Advocate General. Both Y'Tan and Y'Gar's attention became focused on her.

"You stand here today accused of murder," the Advocate General continued. "Specifically, the massacre of the village of Joral twenty-five years ago."

Y'Tan slowly turned his head to face Y'Gar once again as the Advocate General continued.

"Y'Gar stands as your accuser. And as the only remaining survivor of the village of Joral, is granted the right of the Shal'Na."

The Advocate General disappeared from view as she stooped under the top of the bench, and seconds later, emerged holding a jewel-encrusted-handled scimitar. She raised it high above her head to the cheer of the assembly. A moment later, she threw it to the dirt below.

It landed squarely at Y'Gar's feet.

"Pick up the blade," commanded the Advocate General.

Y'Gar stood silently, doing nothing. The Advocate General repeated her order more forcefully. With great hesitation, Y'Gar

slowly stooped down and grasped the scimitar by its handle. He rose to stand fully erect again, holding the blade at his side.

“Look at this man,” said the Advocate General, indicating Y’Tan.

Y’Gar turned his attention to the old man.

“This is the man who killed your parents, burned your entire village,” boomed the Advocate General. “This is the man who robbed you of your heritage, your legacy as a Yarzonian! Do you not feel the hatred burning inside of you? Joral must be avenged! Carry out the Shal’Na!”

Y’Gar glanced worriedly about him. First to Y’Tan with his pained expression. Then, he stared deeply into the green-on-green eyes of the Advocate General, her expression stony and cold. Then he glanced out at the faceless multitude assembled in the Council chamber, their voices chanting “Shal’Na!”

Finally, he stared deeply into the eyes of Gael Mann Tieth. Her expression puzzled him most of all.

She seemed to have joined in the frenzy of the crowd. Her red, reptilian eyes burned with fire of vengeance. Her mouth watered and her breaths came in the form of the quick panting of an animal, thirsty for blood. And death.

He turned back to Y’Tan. The endless chant of the crowd brought back to the surface feelings which Y’Gar had kept repressed for years. His sadness and anger at never knowing who his birth parents were. His hatred for all the human children in school on Earth who had ridiculed him and called him names because he was different from them. His despair in believing for the longest time that he was alone in the universe.

Y’Tan had caused him to feel all this. He had taken from Y’Gar any semblance of a normal life which he could have had on Yarzon. It would be so easy, so easy, to take Y’Tan’s life as payment for all those years of pain!

But then, Y'Gar remembered Y'Alnac, Y'Tan's impetuous, overanxious son whom he had met all too briefly when he arrived in Tanbul. Y'Alnac was not a child who had been raised with a silver spoon in his mouth. He had not been bred to think of himself as superior to anyone else. He was a pleasant young man whom, perhaps in another lifetime, Y'Gar could have called 'friend'.

Y'Tan had raised him that way. He had cared for Y'Alnac and nurtured him with as much love and patience as the flowers he raised in that gigantic arboretum. Y'Tan was not evil. He had been a victim of circumstances beyond his control; forced to take desperate measures to save his people. Would Y'Gar have done any less?

Slowly, Y'Gar released his grip on the scimitar and let it fall limply to the dirt. The chanting of the crowd ceased as the blade hit the ground once, bounced briefly, and then settled with a slight cloud of dust. Y'Gar faced the Advocate General. The look on his face stern and unyielding.

"I will not kill him!" he said.

"Then the right falls to your Standby," said the Advocate General.

Gael Mann Tieth lunged for the scimitar, plucking it from the ground in one graceful, flowing gesture. She held it in her hand, ready to strike, the look on her face fierce and vicious. She whirled to face Y'Tan.

"She will not kill him either!" said Y'Gar.

Tieth cocked her head back to face Y'Gar. He noticed that she was still panting heavily, wound up as tight as a watch spring and ready to burst. Y'Gar knew that she wasn't going to like this, but she really had no choice in the matter. Y'Gar glared hard at her. He hoped it was enough.

"What?" Tieth hissed in between breaths.

“Put the blade down, Tieth,” said Y’Gar gently. “It’s over.”

“How can you let him live?” snarled Tieth, her breathing rapidly increasing. “He killed your parents! Took from you any kind of life you could have had!”

“I forgive him,” said Y’Gar gently. He glanced at Y’Tan. The old man looked back at him, smiling. Tears welling up in his eyes.

Tieth growled fiercely, raising the blade of the scimitar high above her head. Y’Gar shot a glance at the enraged Lieutenant.

“Put the blade down *now*, Tieth!” boomed Y’Gar. “That’s an order!”

But it was too late.

With a blood-curdling howl, Gael Mann Tieth lunged forward towards Y’Tan. Y’Gar stood by helplessly as Tieth raised the blade high above her head, and with one swift, clean slice, brought it crashing down on Y’Tan’s neck. His head separated from his body as if it had never really been part of it. The head rolled away from the torso and came to an abrupt halt in front of the Advocates’ bench, its expression frozen in sheer disbelief.

Gael Mann Tieth crouched to the ground, regaining her composure as Y’Tan’s torso slumped to the dirt floor, gradually being swallowed up by a pool of its own blood. Tieth heaved and gasped for breath as Y’Gar grasped her shoulders, his grip like a vice. He raised the young Lieutenant to her feet and whirled her body around so that she was facing him directly. His look was one of pure malice.

“Tieth, you fool!” he hissed.

“I did it,” she gasped with a satisfied smile. “I made him pay!”

“The Shal’Na isn’t about revenge!” said Y’Gar painfully.

Tieth's face contorted in confusion. She shook her head saying, "But... the name... it means..."

"'Retribution' was the only word in Federation standard that came closest to translating its full meaning!"

Tieth looked longingly into Y'Gar's eyes for an explanation that, he could only assume, was completely lost on her.

"Think of the word itself," said Y'Gar. "'Retribute,' Retribute. To repay, to give again! There's only one way to repay someone for a past injustice, and that's to say that you forgive them! That's what the Shal'Na is all about: seeing the person who did wrong by you and finding that forgiveness within your heart!"

Y'Gar could see the realization dawning on Gael Mann Tieth's face. It was as if she had opened Pandora's box, and then burned it before allowing 'Hope' to escape. He released his grip on her shoulders, and she slowly sank to the floor.

Y'Gar's attention returned to the body of H'VratY'Tan. The two bailiffs had returned with a stretcher and had just finished placing the bloodied corpse onto it. They covered the body with a bright red cloth, and together, the two bailiffs lifted the stretcher from the ground, and took it away.

Y'Gar turned to face the Advocate General once again.

"The Shal'Na is ended," she intoned.

"No!" cried Y'Gar, his expression pained. "It can't end! Not like this!"

"H'VratY'Tan's body will be buried with honors," said the Advocate General.

Y'Gar cast his eyes ashamedly to the ground. "I've failed," he muttered.

"No," said the Advocate General.

Y'Gar slowly raised his head to face her once again.

“Your honor has not been stained by this... unfortunate incident,” said the Advocate General gently. “I cannot speak so for your companion. She will have to find her own recompense. But you performed the Shal’Na with great honor. In accordance with all of our customs and traditions.”

“That’s little consolation,” said Y’Gar.

“I know. But when I performed the Shal’Na years ago, I did not have your strength of will to forgive.”

Y’Gar’s branched eyebrows raised in astonishment. It was not customary for an Advocate to share such a personal note with a citizen. And for the Advocate General to share it with a Yarzonian who wasn’t even officially recognized as a citizen, took even greater courage. Y’Gar smiled at the Advocate General, and she weakly returned the gesture.

Y’Gar turned away from the Advocates’ bench and noticed Gael Mann Tieth standing fully at attention, her face stony and impassive. “Come on, Tieth,” he said. “Let’s go home.”

Y’Gar extended his arm and Gael Mann Tieth silently stepped towards the aisle leading to the great doors of the Council chamber. Y’Gar slowly began to follow her up the aisle but stopped dead in his tracks as he heard the Advocate General’s voice call out to him. He turned to face the bench once again and noticed that the Advocate General was standing.

“Let your name be spoken throughout all the tribes of the Yarzonian,” intoned the Advocate General. “You are... Y’Gar: ‘beloved gift of God!’”

“Y’Gar: ‘beloved gift of God.’”

Y’Gar beamed proudly as the assembly repeated his name over and over again. The smile grew even wider as he turned on his heel and marched towards the chamber doors. He felt his eyes watering slightly as the doors opened, once again flooding the room with a dull yellow light. As he stepped through the

threshold and surveyed the immense, modern city before him, he sighed happily to himself.

He had been welcomed home!

* * *

The *Hawking II* streaked through the endless void of space at warp speed, passing stars, planets, and all other forms of heavenly bodies. On board the shuttlecraft, two people sat in silence.

Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth ran her fingers across the lighted console panel in front of her, manipulating the ship's course and speed. Across from her, in the other pilot seat, Commander Y'Gar stared out the window at the white, fibrous streaks that were the stars passing by the ship.

Out of the corner of his eye, Y'Gar noticed Gael Mann Tieth glance at him quickly before returning her attention her piloting. A moment of silence passed.

"We'll rendezvous with the *Enterprise* in about four hours," reported Tieth.

"Fine," said Y'Gar simply.

Tieth nodded satisfactorily to herself and returned her attention to her duty. Y'Gar continued to sit silently, watching the stars streak by outside the ship. His thoughts returned to the events of the previous week. Coming to Yarzon for the very first time, trying to convince the Advocates to allow him to perform the Shal'Na. Swimming in the great ocean, riding to Tanbul, and meeting Y'Tan.

Y'Tan.

The old man who had been responsible for the destruction of Y'Gar's village. The once-great warrior who had become a gardener with an ambition to see the desert bloom once again before he died. Y'Gar sighed disappointedly. Y'Tan never got his wish.

Oh, the Advocates had informed him that Y'Alnac would carry on with his father's dream. They even decided to rename the province of Tanbul after Y'Tan. But still, Y'Gar could not help but feel responsible for ending the man's life before he had the chance to see his dreams fulfilled. Y'Gar knew that the feeling would haunt him for a long time, but he really didn't care.

At least he would never forget Y'Tan.

"All in all, a successful trip," said the voice of Tieth.

Y'Gar glanced over to the opposite pilot seat to see the young woman smiling pleasantly. "Successful?" said Y'Gar quizzically.

"Well, you were finally welcomed as a citizen of Yarzon. And you got the justice you sought."

"Yes," said Y'Gar grimly. "But at what price?"

"What does it matter? As long as you got what you wanted?"

Y'Gar rose from his seat and paced over to Tieth until he stood towering above her. A cross look came over his face.

"That's a rather selfish attitude, don't you think?" said Y'Gar. "Don't you feel even the least bit sorry for what happened?"

"No. If he had done to me what he'd done to you, he would not have survived as long as he had."

Y'Gar shook his head disbelievingly. He paced away from Tieth, momentarily moving to the rear of the cockpit without saying a word. He shook his head disbelievingly. Unfortunately, he felt that she did mean every word she had just said. Finally, he turned around and came forward until he stood above Tieth's seat once again.

"Is killing the only thing that makes you happy?" said Y'Gar sternly. "Do you get some kind of pleasure out of inflicting pain on others?"

Tieth glanced up at Y'Gar briefly, saying not a word, and then returning her attention once again to her work. Y'Gar sighed disdainfully, and slowly paced back over to his own seat. As he slumped down into the plushness of the cushions, a sinking feeling came over him.

A feeling that, perhaps, it was the only thing that pleased her.

"You realize, of course, that I'm going to have to report this to the Captain," said Y'Gar.

"What?" said Tieth, snapping her head around to look directly at Y'Gar.

"You disobeyed the direct orders of a superior officer."

Y'Gar then rose from his seat again and slowly approached Tieth.

"But more importantly," he continued, "you broke the sacred trust of the Shal'Na. To stand by in the rite is a great honor, which binds one person to another forever. It is an honor that I gave to you. And it is an honor you shall no longer have!"

Y'Gar returned quietly to his seat. For the remaining four hours of their return to the *Enterprise*, Y'Gar and Gael Mann Tieth did not exchange one word between them.

The doors parted open and Y'Gar stepped through the threshold and into his quarters. A week had passed since his return from Yarzon, and Y'Gar had been very busy recently, having to catch up with the rest of the line officers aboard the *Enterprise*, mapping and recording a new stellar cluster near Aldebaran.

With a great deal of relief, his shift today came to end, and Y'Gar had trotted back to his quarters to plop down on his sofa for a short nap. He really didn't want to go to the rec room this evening. But Curtis Winston and Thuroq Mirgant were planning a surprise birthday party for Saallak; and they had told him that she would be very disappointed if he weren't there.

Personally, Y'Gar couldn't believe that an exotic woman like Saallak would be upset if he didn't show up at her party. After all, she did have nearly half the men on the ship lusting after her, including many higher-ranking officers. And he was sure that the male-to-female ratio at the party was going to be leaning against him, as usual.

Oh well, he thought, better go anyway. I'm really not in the mood for any of Mirgant's shenanigans if I don't. Not after this past week.

He knew, though, that at least one person *wouldn't* be attending: Lieutenant Gael Mann Tieth.

He'd heard that her duties had been restricted since their return to the *Enterprise*, pending an official hearing over her conduct on Yarzon. What her ultimate fate would be remained to be seen. And while he still seethed over what she did, he also couldn't help but feel more than a bit sorry for her.

While it was true that she had arrogantly ignored his orders to stand down, he recalled that, not so long ago, he himself had violated his own captain's standing order and recklessly pursued the terrorist Devorax on his own. Nearly to his own demise. Perhaps he and Tieth were more similar than either one cared to admit.

Perhaps... he would consider being the advocate she needed.

* * *

For the first time in what seemed like forever, Y'Gar stopped in the doorway of his quarters and glanced quickly about the room. He wasn't sure if it was just that he was tired, but he took the time to inspect the interior of the room more carefully than he had ever done since he came aboard the *Enterprise*. He suddenly realized how really barren his quarters were.

Oh, there were all the usual amenities: a work desk with a computer console on top, food replicators, a working bathroom, and the standard furnishings officers received with their commissions. But there was really nothing in the quarters that was uniquely *his*. No favorite paintings, pictures of loved ones, sculptures, nothing.

Except for one thing.

Y'Gar strolled over to his couch and plopped down into the plushness of its cushions. As he bent down to remove his boots he stared at the clear-glass coffee table situated in front of the couch. On top of it sat the potted hadecolius blossom Y'Tan had given him. Its orange-yellow petals were opened and drooped down to reveal the stamen inside.

Y'Gar removed his final, right boot with a great sigh of satisfaction and leaned into the cushions. As he did, something

caught his eye. The hadecolius had basically been one flower atop a thorny green stem, but Y'Gar now noticed something new.

Perhaps it had been the long hours he had been putting in at work, and the fact that he never noticed the interior of his quarters as a rule, but now the hadecolius had a second stem poking its way up from the rich, black soil. Atop this new, thin, thorny stem, was a tiny green bud that had yet to open.

Y'Gar smiled happily to himself and shifted his body in the couch until he could stretch himself out and lay comfortably across its length. He stared happily at the new blossom on his plant until his eyes grew heavy. Y'Gar tried in vain to fight the oncoming fatigue, but in the end, it proved to be too great a foe for him to overcome, and he closed his eyes.