

## A New Wrinkle On The Skin

Begin Transmission:

Stardate 432720.7

49<sup>th</sup> Marine Strike Group

qa'Tor Prime; Synies Star System

### Chapter One

“Get me air support, Gamma Flight you know what I want. Soften them up!”

His voice boomed throughout the open com channels with that gruff Klingon baritone. Lt. Colonel Kered Nella was in command of the forces about to attack the Jem'Hadar facility on qa'Tor Prime.

The misconception that the Jem'Hadar were such fierce fighters throughout the quadrant were given only by Starfleet ground forces in the Dominion Wars conflict. Once the council was convinced that the need for specialized forces were once again needed in the Federation the Starfleet Marine Corps was redeployed and training began once again in 2377. Jem' Hadar forces had been driven back to minor outposts through the quadrant step by scorching step after their handlers “The Founders” had abandoned them and the source of their hold on the species the drug Ketracel White dried up.

Nella was sure that this would be a simple round up mission and that he and his forces would be back at Starbase 12 by the end of the week. These pat'ath had never run across anything like his troops before, and the Lt. Colonel was sure that those who lived through the ordeal would never forget this experience.

The 49<sup>th</sup> MSG and their new FA-63 Razorbeast all purpose fighters were state of the art in air superiority. The delta ordnance that they were using would detonate 10 meters above the target and saturate the area with an immobilization field allowing the troops to capture and render the enemy useless. The ordnance was developed for use against such hostel foes like the Borg, and Nella was sure that to would work against the Jem'Hadar who had little to no bio organic implants like the Cyborg race that occasionally ravaged the Alpha quadrant.

Chatter came back over the open com channels. “Green base, this is Gamma Flight. Ordinance deployed there are a few stragglers out there that escaped the field, so be advised. Most of their forces will be immobile for the next two hours. Call us up again if you need further assistance.”

A slight smile crossed Kered Nella's countenance as he took a moment to take in this new information. Then he gave his orders.

"I want Bravo team to hunt down those stragglers, make sure that *Thorn* does this by the numbers, I want someone to interrogate this time. Have Alpha and Delta teams go into the suppression fields and disarm the other combatants and put them into status while we clean up the area."

Lieutenant Nichelle Fukuda put out the word and asked, "Colonel should we deploy the ground vehicles with the men?"

"Have they been checked out after coming off the drop-ships, *Bookworm*?" inquired the Commanding Officer.

"No Sir, the techs say they will be another, stand by Sir. Report coming through now. Sir, 15 minuets and the tanks will be ready."

"Thank you *Bookworm*, make sure that the tanks can follow Alpha and Delta into the field as soon as they are ready. Tell the techs good work. Let *Tiger* and *Wicked* know they will have support if they need it." Nella walked back and forth considering his options now.

## Chapter Two

Major Lynn Brando aka *Thorn*, knew of Lt. Colonel Nella's overall strategy, she was his wife after all and had helped him develop it. Now she and her platoon of Groundbeasts were out one kilometer in front of the leading suppression field area seeking stragglers that escaped the fields influence. The last time she had been in charge of a hunt and suppress mission like this she fragged one too many of the Breen Confederation soldiers, and there was no one left to question. It's hard to remember that when a foe wants you dead that you have to restrain yourself from taking them out with the same zeal. This was one of the things that had the most getting used to from her days in the past as a MACO ground pounder. Now Starfleet wanted the targets taken out with as much non lethal force as possible.

Thorn was a time traveler who came forward in time to be with her fierce husband when he fell back in time a few years ago. Back when she was a shooter with the Federation's MACO division it was more of a protect and defend strategy and often times killing enemy combatants was the par for the course. Today the Starfleet Marine Corps was trained to take prisoners for detention and deportation back to their own facilities and people. The Marines of today were more interested in destroying the weapons and facilitates of war then to annihilate the combatants. It's hard to build a community based on peace if you are killing everyone in site. Yet Major Brando knew as well as any of her squads that sometimes you had to burn a few match heads in order to save the pack of matches.

There was a sound to her left, picked up by her helmets sound enhancement speakers. The signal of a personal transporter, the kind that the Jem'Hadar were known to use. Even though the members of her platoon had their stealth camos on, the uniforms didn't render them completely invisible. Under an infrared spectrum her forces could be detected. In an automatic reflex, the kind honed over many years to keep her alive, Thorn lead to the left with her phaser rifle and let of a powerful stun blast that knocked the Jem'Hadar off his feet just as he materialized at her side.

“Enemy engaged sector 47, one Tango down. Listen up for their transporter signals team. Stay Kelvin Negative!” was what she put out on her coded channel.

“KelNeg, aye Major.” Was the reply from her sergeant Cortez.

During the next half hour it was determined through interrogation that all but two of the 15 stragglers had been accounted for. This report went back up the chain of command to Kered Nella and it was his decision to let them go for now as they held the rest of the prisoners in the camps detention field. But Thorn knew better and in a private meeting on coms she told him so.

“Nella ya know tha those two missing Jem'Hadar could be a serious problem if we just let ‘em go?”

“I’m aware of that *Thorn*,” Replied Colonel Nella “That is why I am letting them go, they will lead us to what is really taking place here at this facility.”

“Then ya think thars is more here than meets the eye?” asked his erstwhile ground force commander.

“Indeed I do my mate,” the smile on his face was evident in his voice. “The other captives seem very nervous about something. Our medics tell me that almost every one of them seems to be worried that something will be found if they are unable to protect it. I have our two ornithopters moving out in silent arches seeking and following the last two escapees to see what we can learn.”

Thorn’s voice softened a little when she said, “Ya ‘new tis yer mind, and yer temperament is why I love ya Nella. If I were not by yer side as a warrior, I would surely respect ya as a worthy adversary.”

### Chapter Three

High above the outcroppings of native basalt 23 kilometers Northeast of the Marines encampment the untethered ornithopters; *Talon* and *Skry* were letting their wings carry them upon the thermals of the planet’s surface. From the ground the vehicles may have looked like to huge birds of prey circling and dancing in the air above. To an inhabitant this observation would have been half true. The winged vehicles were constructed to resemble large birds, indeed their mechanics were meant to mimic that of avians.

But that was where the similarities ended, for in fact the Marines used the gliders for swift and silent reconnaissance where they were not wanted to be observed. Each ornithopter carried an elaborate sensor package with the ability to locate and track varied life forms and sentient made signals. Right now they were tracking their prey from 2 kilometers up.

Des'Pri of Vulcan, Callsign: *Dezz* was at the controls of *Talon*, and his wing partner *Telua*, the female Trill known as Sails Thork was piloting the other craft *Skry*.

“It appears that the Jem'Hadar are heading to that basalt hill region below.” Intoned the Vulcan over the com.

“Copy that *Dezz*, let’s see if we can get closer and get a sensor reading.” Stated the Trill.

As the two craft flew closer internal sensors pinged into action as multiple life signs began to show up in the pilots HUD's. Yet there was something odd about what the computers were giving them, it differed from the information that the Marines expected to see.

“I am reading multiple life signs within the cave like structure below, yet they seem highly unusual for Jem'Hadar, it is like they are but are not the same species.” Reported the Vulcan pilot.

“*Dezz*, if I didn’t know any better, I would swear that those were the life signs of children and...”, but the rest of *Telua's* response was broken off as a blast from a proton cannon sizzled past her starboard wing. “That was too close, we have been uncovered, let’s bug out and make our report before we are taken out of play.” Was how the Trill countered.

“Indeed Lieutenant, what we have discovered may be of great importance to the Lieutenant Colonel.”

With that, the two craft banked to the west to make their report to the Marine Officer In Charge. While below preparations were being made ready for unwelcome visitors.

## Chapter Four

“Children and Females!” boomed the large Klingon. “Fek'lar's Teeth!! I was about to drop some very heavy ordinance on what we thought was a weapons facility. Bas and his intelligence B'ah Foons will pay for what could have been a costly mistake!”

The Lt. Colonel was holding an impromptu meeting with his staff officers after the report from the ornithopter pilots return a half hour ago. Kered Nella wanted answers, the information that he was provided by Starfleet Intelligence turned out not to be credible . The best way he knew how to get answers was to ask his people, because it’s a good Commander he knew that he did not have all of the answers available through his intellect alone.

“Colonel, I know of just the people to give us some insight into what we know already” said *Polaris* the ships Chief Medical Officer; Dr. Destiny Robles.

Fifteen minuets later the Jem'Hadar Commander was in the office with them, he was accompanied with two of his senior officers. All under heavy “protection” by a squad of Spec Ops types. Other than that the captivates were being treated like the ranking officials they were.

“Please, Sit DOWN,” the gruff Klingon said in his best diplomatic tone, which still sounded like a barked command to those in the room who knew him. “First let me introduce you to my command staff,” Nella went quickly around the room stating everyone’s Callsign and function.

“Now let me tell you what we know, and then how you can help yourselves. Then if you wish you can introduce yourselves.” And Kered Nella sat down placed his bearded chin on steeped fingers and began.

The Commander known as Ju'Nan was taken aback by what the Marine Starfleeter said, how could they have known so much? One of the others must have talked... no that was unthinkable he knew all the Jem'Hadar and knew not one of them would have given away their precious secret. Only slightly aware of the fact his mask may have slipped a bit, Ju'Nan nodded his head and looked at his officers. They nodded back, and of course did not smile.

"Marine Warrior you are correct, the ones underground are our families. The little ones and ... the Females." Said the leader of the Jem'Hadar.

Some of the Starfleet officers looked at each other with this new information, the development of a female to the species was a game changer. They all knew that the Founders could genetically engineer and change the Jem'Hadar they augmented the Alphas that were separated from the original strain back in the Gamma Quadrant. The Changelings had tried to breed the best warriors the Alpha quadrant had ever seen, and now it looked as if they had left the quadrant with an even better surprise. Like crap on a stick, the Federation wasn't going to want to touch this sticky situation.

"Tell us about your females Ju'Nan, the last time we heard your species had no females." Stated *Polaris*.

During the next hour Ju'Nan and his officers told the Marines assembled about how the Founders left the stranded Jem'Hadar in the Alpha quadrant the gift of bi sexual procreation. How they had been working on creating a female of the species and, to allow their offspring to grow up at a somewhat normal rate, more like three years for every Human years until the age of 7. The Founders still wanted the Jem'Hadar to be fierce warriors. So the new genetic variation was a combination of all those that made up the strongest of species in the Alpha Quadrant. Klingon, Human, Tholian, Gorn, Caitain, and Romulan among others. This was what was suspected in the creation of the faction of Jem'Hadar known as the "Alphas" in the Dominion War. They even explained how they carried a strange new brain organ that would be able to carry the parents' muscle and fighting skills from one generation to the next. As the child grows to maturity it's body begins to "remember" how to behave like a warrior.

"Before our Vorta departed she said that the Females would be more gentle; they had to explain the meaning of that word to us, than we are. Yet that seems not to be the case, especially near their young ones. They can be some of the most war-like of any of our kind has seen in some instances," noted the Jem'Hadar known as Ch`uck.

"They are very pleasant to be with Ch`uck, you have yet to take a mate. Wiessa is always gentle with me and the little ones, and she gets along with all the other females except for Syriz Uon, and that is no surprise. The females are like us but different, and they smell *rekelt* all the time. I find them to be a good thing, I am glad the Founders left them for us as reward for all our service to the Dominion." Replied Commander Ju'Nan.

The remaining Jem'Hadar nodded in agreement with the Commander they all fell into a reverent silence for a moment. One of the last things that the Jem'Hadar said was this strange thing that their Vorta had explained.

Addressing Kered Nella, Ju'Nan said: "The Founders know that the strength of the Jem'Hadar will be needed in the Alpha Quadrant in the years to come, a conflict that the Founders were trying to get your people ready for the only way they knew how. By conquering them and forcing you to be their warriors like we were. They found your combined strengths to be something they had never before

encountered. Multiple races fighting all for the same cause. Each species strengths enhancing and strengthening the others. They were hoping to divide and conquer, then your Sisko; The Emissary, stepped in and reunited the forces against the Dominion. Then there was the Cardassians, and they're betrayal of us. The tactics were turned and the strongest forces won.”

“Some of this you may know already Marine Warrior, but the Vorta told us one more thing. When the Federation comes, take them seriously and follow their lead, they will help you to become the people we want you to be. Trust them, they know the honor of warriors and people.” Then Ju'Nan looked around the room and finished by saying. “This is why we are telling this to you, you all carry the sign of the Federation and you captured, but did not kill us. We now know what the Founders were trying to tell us was true.”

Sometime after their guests had been taken back to their home away from home, Lt. Colonel Nella was having some raktijino with members of his staff. They had a few things to consider and a report to make to Starfleet before anything else. “Well This is a New Wrinkle on The Skin.” Laughed the Klingon.

## Chapter Five

Starfleet sent the word back to the Marines to give them a congratulations on the non lethal tactics taken against the Jem'Hadar. Of course the bottom line is that the prisoners should be released and sent back to their families and that an observer should be left behind, and to take as many warriors as will want to go with the Marines for training. There was also an order to find out if this community knew of any others left in the Alpha Quadrant so that the Federation could find them and offer any assistance. The Federation could even find them a world to settle if that interested their leaders.

Presently the Jem'Hadar were escorted back to their homes, there was no further need of an armed escort, but an honor guard was placed at their disposal. Also a Security Contingent was accompanying them because of the officers going to meet with the families this trip. So a platoon was sent along with the 49th's officers. Kered Nella's first Officer Major R'raaww Hantrú “*Tiger*” and the First Contact specialist Dr. Valerie Craft “*Chronicle*” also the Detachment's Xeno Anthropologist Dr. Irena Majestic aka “*Kingbee*”. The also brought with them Major Lynn Brando “*Thorn*” and M Cap. Gil-Jahaan Bas “*Norway*” both Marines under arms.

Norway moved closer to the XO and said to him, “Major, I can see a few hidden weapon emplacements in the area, tactically we would have had to take them out if we were to have tried an open assault.” Was what the intelligence officer advised.

The Caitain looked at Bas with his emerald eyes and nodded in agreement. It was clear to Norway that not only did Major R'raaww understand, but he saw what the Trill was talking about.

“I knoww what you arrre thinking Norrway, but I do not have to look a´rround to see them, I can smell (\*sniff, sniff) the weapons luubricantss and ssome leaking plasssma from some of the poorly

maintained emplamentsss.” purred the XO in his feline manner. It was the intelligence officer's turn to nod at his superior’s prowess.

As they moved in a group towards the entrance of the inner caverns a voice came from hidden speakers. The voice was stern, hard, but not quite as rough as the Jem'Hadar that the Marines were used to hearing.

“So Ju’Nan is it you who bring us prisoners or is it you who come back as prisoners!?” said the disembodied voice in a challenge.

“Look upon us, you can see we are all together. All of us who left to fight have come back and whole. Look upon them Ja'owi this is the Federation as promised by the Vorta. They have proved themselves the honored warriors we were told of. It is time for you to allow us to present them to the people for The Crucible.”

“Pahh, some Humans, a Klingon, a Cat Man and some Andorians. Which one is the champion that can counter ME and the Jem'Hadar WAY of battle?” asked the voice again in it’s mocking tones. “Bring them in, so that we can get this over with, they are either who you claim them to be or corpses to be sent back to their false counterparts. Come in Federations.... If that’s who you claim to be!”

## Chapter Six

“Major I don’t think this Crucible is going to be good for us, I have been reading over the text of the document they gave us, there are three phases that our candidate has to pass. The first session to be a test of battle tactics against one of them in a simulation of some sort. Then a sort of gauntlet, where someone has to pass through a cordon of about 50 of their armed warriors and get past without a scratch.” All this from the team's First Contact Liaison, Valerie Craft. “And last the candidate has to fight their most fierce warrior ... HER.”

*Chronicle* pointed to a group of about 12 warriors and it seemed that about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> were females, yet one of them stood out from the others, it wasn't her height or her build. It was the way she carried herself was, so menacingly martial, her shoulders were back, her chin held higher than the others. But the way her eyes looked at you, and at this moment those eyes were upon them all. It gave you the feeling that they knew no fear. The kind of feeling where you know that the person has no use for you, you can be disposed of in a heartbeat and it would be like smearing the bug that landed on your open arm.

“Thank you Lieutenant,” *Tiger* had been scanning the room just the way a warrior does. Sizing up the forces in the area. Approximately 300 capable fighters, another maybe 100 of them adolescents.

“Tell me *C*hronicle what does the document ssay about our candidate. Iss there a limit to the number of individuals that can be ussed to complete the Cruccible?” The major also looked at the room about him, it was not a cave cut from the living basalt. The chamber they were currently in looked like a community gymnasium. The walls were quickcreate with tanium struts and coverings to give the whole

place with the look of a starship. It was all very modern and the facility could have either, gone on for kilometers or this could just be the first of many levels, or both.

"I don't understand Sir, the document refers to us as "The Challenged" in just about every instance it neither quantifies or enumerates the number of The Challenged or specifies the name, gender or species of The Challenged either. I would assume that the text is talking about one individual though. This is the kind of culture we seem to be with right now." Quoted *Chronicle* from the PADD in her hands.

"*KingBee*, please come here for a moment." Asked the First Officer.

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Irene Majestic nearly leapt over to the other two officers. *KingBee* as she was known to the Strike Group had been in the top 3% of her graduating class in Starfleet Academy. She studied Xeno Behavioral Studies at the Vulcan Science Institute and scored higher than any Vulcan in her class. Then she obtained her doctorate in Xeno Anthropology at the University of Oxford, Mars Colony ahead of any other previous graduate in the history of the institution. Dr. Irene Majestic was still 22 when she graduated from the Starfleet Marine Academy and trained in light weapons and finished her second doctorate with a Marine Corp. author of a War College shattering thesis on "Strategy in Relationship, To Aliens Martial Dictates." A text now considered to be a bonafide must read at the Starfleet Marine Corps Academy. Just now turning 24, *KingBee* was on her first off world assignment outside the Federation.

"So okay Sir, it's so amazing here. These people fit almost exactly within the parameters of my work. It's uncanny that I could see something like this on my first time out.., So okay, eh Sir, there's a hierarchy going on here where the male driven society is fantastically being challenged by one dominate female. It has all the males on edge, because the females are asserting themselves through this one "woman", I mean that is what we would call her but, I don't know the name for female Jem'Hadar, because languages was never my strength in college, and with the...". *KingBee* rambled on.

A wrinkled whisker and a cat like yawn came from R'raaww with a slight wink to *Chronicle* at his left. "Oh excuse me Lieutenant, sorry no raktijino this morning. Look that iss all well and good, but I asked you over here to take a look at this texxt document here and ssee if you can ansswer my quesstion about it wwhen you are finisshed with it."

*KingBee* took the PADD from *Chronicle* with a nod and scrolled through the document quickly, then with a little more deliberation and a bit less speed than the first time the Dr. began to read. In less than a minute she seemed to have read the entire article. She handed the PADD back to the First Contact Diplomat.

"Your question, Sir?" There was a distinct change in her behavior. Gone was the young woman and now some medically sterile Marine looked into the emerald eyes of her Commanding Officer.

R'raaww wasn't sure if he had offended her with his yawn joke or if it was something else. Then the XO in him took over and he stopped caring about hurt feelings. So he asked, "Lieutenant, iss there a limit to the number of individualss that can be used to complete the Crussible?"

Casual in her body posture, but nevertheless still intense *KingBee* looked at the others and stated, "No Sir, the document and the culture as I see it, both state an emphatic no."

"You sseem prreetty ssure of that Firsst Lieutenant can you exxplain to us why?" countered the Major.



“Well you see Sir, what we have here is a very close knit community, steeped in a warrior ethos. The fact that they count on each other for just about everything shows that they must work as a team. One old instance of ancient anthropology would have used the term “Tribal” to describe them.” Stated the Doctor. “The text that the Lieutenant just shared with me only states that The Challenged has to participate in the Crucible and complete the trials to the satisfaction of the elders. To include a statement like that in their texts shows a clear indication of this being a elder driven patriarchal based society, as we might expect from a warrior culture that up until now has known no females. That is my conclusion, Sir.”

“Thank you for your assessment Lieutenant, now please excuse me.” and *Tiger* stepped away from the women to check with some of his other personnel.

Moving over towards *Thorn* the Caitain surreptitiously asked, “How iss *Norrrway* getting along with it Majorr?”

“Am not sure Sir, what ya’ve asked him to do should take three programmers a day to complete, but ti’ve bloody well never seen anyone encode sa fast before.” Said Brando with her Irish lilt that came out whenever she got excited.

“Well Major, *Norrrway* has some interrrressting attrrrributess that very few Starfleet officerssss even know about, all I can tell you iss that the Captain here a very extensssive neural network, in his wee ssized head,” quipped the First Officer. He knelt down to ask a question of the intelligence man.

“Howw much longer *Norrrway*?”

“Just a few more minutes Sir, I had to remember some of the thrust parameters for the FA/ 63 that were left out of the last update on its specs.” Bas told his CO.

At that moment there was the sound of a thrice struck gong, and as the Federation Representatives looked up there was a projection of a podium with one of the oldest Jem'Hadar they had yet seen addressing the throng.

“People it is time to see if the Vorta was right, is this Federation the ones we should ally with in this new place we are in? Let the Crucible begin!”

## Chapter Seven

The first trial of the Crucible was to be a simulation of an interstellar battle between Starfleet forces and the Jem'Hadar battlefleet. Gil-Jahaan Bas would conduct the operations of the Starfleet ships. It was seen that the Jem'Hadar Female Ja'owi, who looked as if she were the de facto leader of this community would be the representative for this contest. She strode past the knot of Male “Elders” on her way to the simulator. She came to her spot 30 meters across from where *Norway* stood. All the spectators were a few meters away from the contestants there was plenty of room for them to stand about without being in the way.

The 70 meter domed chamber they were in slowly went dark, and the firmament took shape a close up of a planetary system came into being. In front of the contestants the lighting of several holoscreens came into being. These screens would be able to simulate the functionality of three capital ships, and four attack craft or it's equivalent. In this instance the Jem'Hadar Ja'owi would use Two Battlecruisers and one Battleship, along with four the medium sized Jem'Hadar warships to round out her seven starship fleet. Bas would be employing the use of three Sovereign class Starships, two Defiant Class warships and one squadron twenty-four Fast Attack Ships of FA/63 Razorbeast class. The number of twelve of the smaller craft would be counted as one warship.

The battle was over in two hours, and the outcome was due to one very apparent oversight in the end. The hard bodied Jem'Hadar battleships could pack a devastating punch when a direct hit was scored. Yet because of their mass in a planetary system it made their maneuverability sluggish compared to the agility of the svelte Starfleet vessels.

Shields for both sides held up for a long period of time, but the use of the smaller fighters that Starfleet employed after the first quarter of battle started to wear down on the Jem'Hadar shield frequencies. The Jem'Hadar ships had a difficult time targeting the smaller ships, and when they would try the Starfleet warships and Starships would cover them enough to get away. The Jem'Hadar counted on their ships to be able to pummel the smaller Federation ships, yet because Jem'Hadar intelligence was non existent they had the disadvantage of not taking into consideration how quickly Starfleet technology had progressed since the Dominion War. They did remember to upgrade their own ships systems but without a benchmark index to base their studies with those upgrades still fell behind that of Federation technologies. While the Jem'Hadar could spend time designing refits for their older ships, their resources were not up to par for the combined intellect United Federation of Planets.

The overall objective of this stage was to cripple or destroy the opposing fleet. Due to the Jem'Hadar mentality the outcome had to be complete destruction. The last Jem'Hadar Battleship was obliterated with no survivors at 02:07:34:20 hours on the clock. The rules did not give a time restraint, only a deliberate and final outcome for the defeated fleet. The look of unqualified rage that spread across Ja'owi-s face would have heated a lake to volcanic activity. The lack of up to date tactics and inexperience of command of a real battlefleet served the Jem'Hadar poorly. The ability for the 39 Starfleet ships to expand by six more vessels completely took Ja'owi by surprise. When the Sovereign Class ships separated into Sauer and Battle sections there were suddenly too many ships for the Jem'Hadar ships to follow at the critical point of attack. Then there was the deployment of the Captain's yachts launched as drones which sealed the fate of the two opposing Battle Cruisers. The losses of the Federation forces was kept down to only ten ships. Most of them the fast attack ships, two Captain's yachts, and one Defiant Class Warship.

For the second of the two challenges fifty Jem'Hadar warriors took their places on either side of a gauntlet made of mussel and melee combat weapons. Ja'owi set herself at the middle of this line as well, it was not unusual and it looked like she was ready and willing, much too willing, to inflict much pain to the Starfleeter known as Norway.

That was when R'raaww stepped forward and spoke, "Honored Elderss and your assembled community we will be ussing another of "The Challenged" will take the tassk of running your gauntlet."

Ja'owi leapt from the line and raged, "You can not do this Federation!! The one Norway MUST run the gauntlet it is the Jem'Hadar way and to refuse to comply with the document means forfeiture of the Crucible!"

"Honored Elderss, we have interrupted your text to mean that there iss no ssingle person that iss in the meaning of itss term The Challenged, therefore we will take the opportunity to usse another player." The Executive Officer's gaze went around the room looking at each one of them in the eye, his two emerald eyes firm and hard. "For the nexxt part of the challenge "I" will rrun yourrr gauntlet!" R'raaww nodded just a tad in acknowledgement of what that meant. The Federation leader stepping into the challenge, it would be seen as an honor and not a slight. "I'm ssure that will be acceptable to all." His look alighted upon Ja'owi for conformation and she gave a jerk of her head in affirmative reply. Then she took her place in the line to await the First Officer of her enemy's representative.

## Chapter Eight

Ja'owi was of the first series of Females to be so genetically engineered, she was created to be the best of her breed. Tough, intelligent, a creature that could learn and adapt quickly. The Founders blessing were upon her and the Jem'Hadar. Only this not how she had been taught, for was she not constructed by her perfect makers? The Founders had returned to their world beyond the anomaly and the stars. They had given them new gifts before they left to go back to the strange world of liquid where none but the Gods could dwell. Ja'owi knew that the others called her *Syriz Uon* behind her back. Yet she knew that SHE was the best of the gifts the Founders had left her people? The Females and the means for reproduction for their race! No more vats, or servitude to anyone but their God's. No more of those filthy and weak Vorta. It was only by the will of the Gods were those ones were ever listened to. No more of the Gods and their gift of strength the "White".

Yet the Females were the key to the independence from that vile elixir of their men's strength and vitality. Without it the Males had grown less fierce, more like the children each day. Each day she and the rest of the Females seemed to grow stronger! It was if they could do anything, and as time went by Ja'owi was able to best anyone in the combat arena, with any weapon, or bare hands and martial skill. She could out think, out maneuver or out distance any warrior here and she was proud of that for had the Founders not blessed her with creation, the first of the first set of Females. The Series One.

And this was why she resented the Federation, it was written that they could be trusted if any group could be trusted, she was jealous and concerned that the Federation would take the place of the Founders. Although Ja'owi would not give up when it came to her faith in the Founders, for was that not how she had been breed. If these were the ones they would have to be tested to her satisfaction, if only because she knew the Gods would not wish for things this important to be easy.

As *Tiger* approached the gauntlet his the Chief Medical Officer ran up to him and walked along side of him. "Sir, I was taking with *KingBee* and we believe that Ja'owi has a hero complex." Dr. Robles started to explain. "We think that she may try something desperate if she believes that she is loosing

this time, we also believe that if she sees us as a threat she will try to actually kill you. We have all seen her raging, Sir." *Polaris* grabbed her commanding officer by his tunic and stopped him from moving forward. "R'raaww you could be killed or seriously maimed, she is unstable and if we win this thing she could become completely unhinged."

"Thank you Captain, these arre thingss I was wondering about, myssself," He looked down where she was touching his sleeve and then his green eyes looked back at her, she let go abruptly. "Pleassse stand by with your Med Kit, for I am ssure I will need it beforre this challenge is done." *Tiger* stepped up to the foot of the warriors lines.

He removed his tunic and his short course fur could not his the finely toned musculature beneath it. His muscles rippled as he removed his shirt. He handed it over to the Doctor, then he removed his boots and placed them to the side. As he crouched down ready to make is first move, his tail swooshed about in anticipation. The Warriors made ready and took up their blades, pikes and clubs so they could lay into their quarry.

The gong sounded and *Tiger* flinched, the first three warriors struck long before the Caitain moved. The with the agility of his people he leapt up and to the left jumping two and a half meters in the air with a somersault and slapped each of the Jem'Hadar about their heads or necks just once, but strong enough to make it known he was there. *Tiger* spun to the right and pushed past the next few antagonist like a blur of black fur. His legs swept low and he knocked several warriors to the ground as he moved swiftly and purposefully toward his goal at the end of the gauntlet.

The Caitain moved deliberately almost savagely as he smacked each of the Jem'Hadar along the way and as he approached Ja'owi in the middle of the gauntlet his movements slowed down unpredictably as he wove around and used his back to roll across another warrior. Then grabbed her weapon and ran the tip of the spear only centimeters from his chest while using his strength to keep her from impaling him. Ja'owi couldn't move her spear to inflict the puncture she so desired to give to this Starfleeter. He used a Martial move to take her weapon from her hand while taking her off balance enough to use bring her head down just enough to use her head to launch himself up once more above the fray. He knew she felt that the scraping of his claws on her flesh as her face was forced down on to the mat. There was also the humiliation of being used in this manner for him to get away. It was all a part of his strategy, *Tiger* had never studied psychology, but he knew this kind of warrior, he had seen their type all his adult life.

In another few minutes he was there, his opponents down feeling the stinging of his touch in passing or they were too far away from him to do anything more then to glare at him as he approached the end of the line of their best and most cunning warriors. With a backflip and a dodge to the right, R'raaww came up behind the last Jem'Hadar and spun to trade places with him before the Caitain pushed him away and stepped backwards to cross the termination line. He faced about to walk away when he felt a fist crunch into the right side of his face.

He was given a pain killer and he woke up, sitting on a stretcher. Of course he couldn't talk with a broken jaw, the swelling had to go down before they could reconstruct the broken bones. So he motioned for a PADD and wrote out his explanation and his orders.

“This has actually worked well with my plan, the thing was to get the leader of this ordeal to lose her cool. It seems that most of the Jem'Hadar are ready to see if this will come out as the Founders intended. These people are ready to be brought out into the open and the Federation can do this. Many races will want to see the Jem'Hadar pay for their crimes in the Dominion War, yet it is pretty clear that these are not the same Jem'Hadar that carried out the orders of the Changelings.”

“Now that I am “indisposed” Captain Robles I’d like for you to place me in stasis, this way I can be rested because. This jaw will put me out until it can be properly repaired. I’m just happy that she didn't break my nose, with this swelling there are already some scents that I can’t taste. It is very disorienting, so put me to sleep for a few hours.

“I know you all think that I may have gone overboard with my actions here, but that was the best thing for the situation. Thanks to *Polaris* and *KingBee* I was aware she might try something like her sucker-punch. That Female might have killed me if I hadn't already been moving away from her blow. Which is why it needed to happen, if Ja'owi didn't have a way to bleed of some of that aggression she would try to kill the next one she fights. Which brings me to who that will be.

“This will leave *Thorn* in charge as senior officer, and there is no one better qualified to put up the best fight against this Female Jem'Hadar. Thorn I have just two pieces of advice for you. Get her to make mistakes, because she is inexperienced but extraordinarily strong and dexterous. Also be ready to fight a Klingon because that is what I expect her fighting style to be closest to.

“Now get me out of here, I can’t smell a thing, and I don’t like that sensation. “

## Chapter Nine

“Damn that crazy Caitain man! Ah I canna believe he planned the whole thin'.” Yeah she was worried just a little bit after reading *Tiger's* instructions. That Irish baroque was starting to come back to her speech and that only happened when she was worried. “Onn now he wants me to be fightin this crazy female who is just i'nough unstable to throw the rules oott the winda an kill the next ta she faces. That bein' me!”

“Look at the bright side Thorn, at least you get to spar with your husband all the time. If you can put that Klingon down half the time you'll be just fine.” Stated *Polaris*, “And you check out 100.5% on your health exam, you can take the fight straight to her teeth.” Grinned the Doctor for saying something that she felt was completely Marine like.

“An that's what ya don't be understanin' *Polaris*, it's more like I win ¼ of the time ifa tha. Nella is very competitive and hates to loose. Ya sometimes he remembers to take it easy on me. He gets pretty randy afta a fight wit me, ana he knows he wanna git much lovin if I'ma too bruised up. I ain't that tough, ya know.” Confessed Lynn Brando to her friend.

The two women left the alcove where R'raaww on a stretcher with a stasis enabler on his forehead. Thorn had placed about five guards around him just in case things went south. The women moved over to where the others were standing. The remaining officers had just finished passing around the PADD with *Tiger's* orders on it. They all turned their attention to what was happening now. The First Officer was down, they would put forward the new CO as their Challenged and try to move on from there. They talked about the situation and Major Brando started to gain a little more confidence in her fighting abilities.

*KingBee* said, "She is not going to calm down, but she may feel a bit better by having cold cocked the XO, but if I read her correctly she may believe that she is the only one who can test us properly. It's evident that she sees all of her own people beneath her. Or she would be trying the same thing as we are, allowing the best person possible to take the challenge best suited for them. She sees herself as the only one who can. The question is, what are her true motivations?" and *KingBee* went on like this for a few more moments aloud not really noticing the others were there. "I guess this means I will have to revise my thesis."

The time came about now when the final challenge could begin, the contestants were to meet in a caged off triangular "ring" for the fight. This was not going to be a fight to the death, but if one of the combatants was knocked out or hurt too bad to move any longer the fight was over. The Marine wore traditional 5-kilo fighting gloves while the Jem'Hadar had her hands taped up for the fight, no shoes for either contestant. The cage door was opened and the Females stepped into the ring and the door was shut. They were in opposite corners of the triangle when the gong chimed!

Ja'owi shot from her spot like phaser bolt and pressed her attack on the Human. She ran and bound from the ground a meter into the air, slashing with her hands and frothing with all of her rage. Brando had gone Tharg hunting with her husband and dodging a wounded groundbeast wasn't easy but if you are prepared for it like she was now it could be done. Brando knew that she was not facing a wounded Tharg right now. She thought about what R'raaww said to her in his note, "*Act like you are fighting a Klingon.*" She was in that frame of mind with the Tharg reference. Ja'owi missed and overstepped her mark with her lunge, but instantly delivered a roundhouse punch to Brando's right flank. Deflected almost without thought as well, Brando's body was working on automatic as her mind began to crack the code of how to fight this Titan.

Brando swept low in a feint, but then jumped up to connect with her opponents ribcage for the contest's First Strike! She ducked down low to avoid another back hand. A half step up with her left knee, and *Thorn* brought her instep on to the back of Ja'owi's right inner leg bringing her to her knees. The Jem'Hadar got to her feet and backed away just a little. Then Brando knew what was going on here. She would not follow her prey as the Jem'Hadar female wanted her to do. No The Jem'Hadar was trying to play the crafty game. It was so expected, that was what Brando realized at this instant. There was no deep strategy here. Just the tactic to get the Human out in the open to rip her apart. So that was the plan huh, well everyone has a plan until they get hit in the mouth.

Ja'owi backed up into the center of the ring, and the human moved away from her towards the wall of the ring in a defensive poster. The human had struck the first blows why not press the advantage that is what she would have done. This fight wasn't quite going as she had anticipated. Ja'owi was going to change her tactics now by being on the defensive but the human wasn't taking the bait. She was also being defensive as well almost overly so why was that? Well this was getting her no where, she have to

go back on the offensive. Ja'owi did a backflip then ran straight at the human to bring her to the ground and pound her relentlessly until her foe passed out. Then the Jem'Hadar realized her mistake while her body was at full speed and in motion like a rocket.

This would be a miracle if it worked right, the fact that the Jem'Hadar was infuriated practically seething with rage was to be to Thorn's advantage. She had seen bullies like this before and she knew the best way to get them to make a mistake would be to make them angry so that they would lose their cool and not think about how to win the fight. So Brando stepped aside, and lashed out with a talon like grip at her opponent's windpipe, and with her right hand took her by the crotch and used the Jem'Hadar's own momentum to lift her into the air. Then bouncing her against the iron cage, before slamming her down to the mat. This double body-slam knocked the senses and the wind from the Female. Then before she knew it Brando was trying to wrench the Jem'Hadar's arm from its socket.

The submission hold the human had on her left and dominant arm was excruciating even for a Jem'Hadar. Ja'owi had been dazed and out of breath, completely disoriented, then all of that went away when the pain started. It was twice as bad because she still hadn't been able to catch her breath, the human had wrapped her legs around her torso and was squeezing the rest of the air she had in her lungs out in force, she was going to black out because she couldn't breathe. Ja'owi tried to wiggle free, to use her other arm as leverage, pull away. The held arm was useless and on fire, being ripped free or even broken by this human warrior woman. She knew it was that last mad yank that did it, because that was all she remembered for a long while afterwards.

## Epilogue

It was all over, the judges from the Elders Quorum found that the Federation Representatives had won at least two if not all of the challenges put before them. Because Major R'raaww Hantrú did not cross the line at the end of the Gauntlet he lost the challenge. Later when it was mentioned that the reason he didn't cross the line was because someone had stood in front of him barring his passage the match was seen as a draw. The Federation accepted this ruling with graciousness, since they had already done what was required for the community to take them seriously.

Now the negotiations could begin the settlement for these Jem'Hadar who are left in the Alpha Quadrant. There were more communities of Jem'Hadar out there and this group seemed to know the location of most of those outposts. Even though they wouldn't tell Starfleet where those outposts were they promised to take a holographic recording of what happened here in The Crucible. The footage in the words of these Jem'Hadar would speak volumes to the rest, and soon they expected they would have a community of more than 700 hundred thousand of these brave warriors to join the Federation some day.

Kered Nella had seen the entire challenge as it happened, due to the HUD lenses they all wore, the cameras within the contact lenses recorded all. He was very pleased with his crew and would make sure that they all knew it later. He made a note to himself to requisition some Bloodwine from his uncle back home. After the rest of the crew was able to watch the contests at camp, the debriefing began along with a question and answer period for all those involved. Lt. Colonel Nella knew that the best way to get

knowledge from an exercise was to let the company in on learning process as much as possible, especially if you hand the teachers there on hand. Not heroes of the hour, but today's instructors who can have their mistakes questioned with ideas that could help later on. Nella knew what he could and could not get away with sharing with is Groundbeasts, and this was a complete share.

With the joint recommendations from The First Contact specialist, The First Officer, and MARDET leaders as well as the CO of the mission, he knew that Federation would take seriously any application made by these Jem'Hadar in the years to come. There were a few of the Jem'Hadar that wanted to accompany the Marines when they left Planetside. Surprisingly Ja'owi Syriz Uon was the first, again.

End Transmission:

<b>Character List</b>	<b>Name and Callsign listing. Thank you Crew of the USS Stephen Hawking.</b>	
Story Alias	Callsign	Role
Lt. Colonel Kered Nella	<i>Hawking Actual</i>	Commanding Officer
Major Lynn Brando	<i>Thorn</i>	Bravo Team Leader
Lieutenant Nichelle Fukuda	<i>Bookworm</i>	Com Officer
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Des'Pri Of Vulcan	<i>Dezz</i>	Pilot
1 <sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Sails Thork	<i>Telua</i>	Pilot
Marine Captain Gil-Jahaan Bas	<i>Norway</i>	Intelligence
Lieutenant Dr. Destiny Robles	<i>Polaris</i>	Chief Medical
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ja'owi Syriz Uon	<i>Terror</i>	Jem'Hadar Female
Major R'raaww Hantrú	<i>Tiger</i>	Executive Officer
1 <sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Valerie Craft	<i>Chronicle</i>	First Contact Liaison
1 <sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Dr. Irene Majestic	<i>King Bee</i>	Xeno Anthropologist

Story by Captain Derek Allen  
September 2017