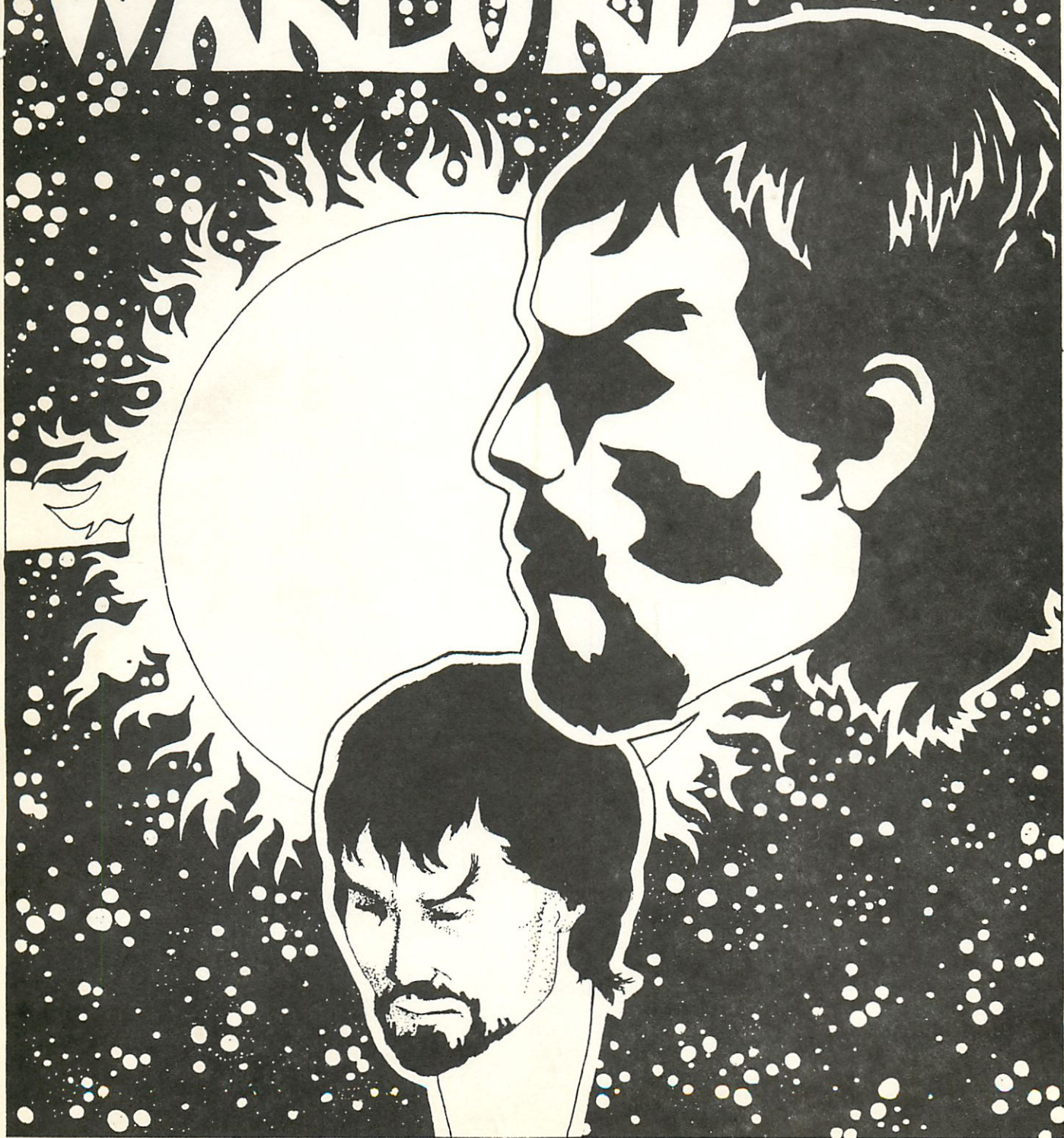


ALKARIN WARLORD



ALKARIN WARLORD

by Fern Marder and Carol Walske
edited by Winston A. Howlett

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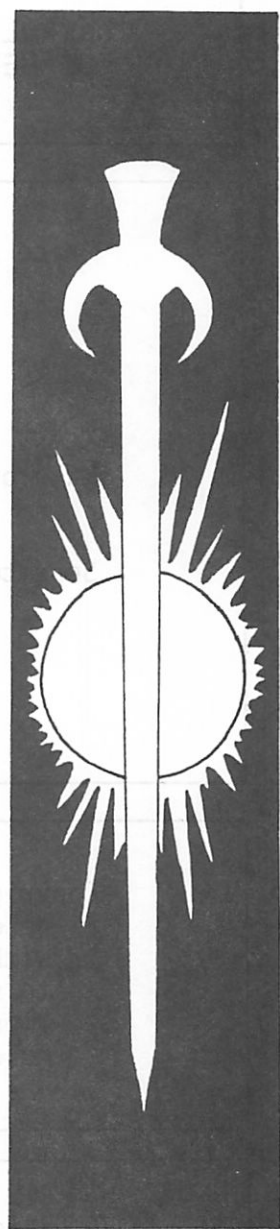
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Music/lyrics--"Beyond the Shadows"

Artwork and calligraphy by Carol Walske

Poetry and music by Fern Marder

*with Carol Walske



Mpingo Press Special Issue • September 1, 1978

DEDICATED TO:

WINSTON A. HOWLETT, FRIEND OF RARE SENSITIVITY AND PERCEPTION, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOYALTY, SELFLESSNESS, AND GOOD HUMOR

AND

KYROL WATERS, KILING OF THE KILINGARLAN, FOR SHARING WITH US HER COURAGE, HOPE, AND TRUST.

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A different arrangement of the music for "*Nu Evriand Fevesan Getheni*" appeared in Universes in Science Fiction, Volume 2,
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Editor's Foreword

Believe it or not, this publication was first conceived by Ye Editor.

You see, I wanted to publish two PROBE Specials in 1978 and knew that I would only find time to produce one of them myself. So, in the late summer of 1977, I approached Carol and Fern with the brilliant idea of a major *Nu Ormene1* project for PROBE. They would select the type of novel or story collection they would want to do (within the bounds of PROBE's editorial tastes) and I would be able to just sit back and do a little editing and publishing, since the dear ladies had already set up an efficient system of writing, proof-reading, laying out, typing, lettering and illustrating almost all their stories. Such a project would be--for me--a piece of cake.

Ha!

The first thing that happened after the initial agreement was that the daughters of the *Ormene1* wanted the project to be a Mpingo Press Special, and not a PROBE Special. Secondly, they wanted the photo-offset operation to be on an economic par with the less expensive mimeograph operation called THRESHOLD, which they were writing and illustrating for Poison Pen Press at the time.

I soon agreed with these alterations of my dream because they proved to be based upon sound reasoning. But little did I know how much "fun" being editor/publisher of a *Nu Ormene1* project would bring me, like--

Seven thousand calls to my printer, asking "How much would it cost to print five hundred copies of 200 pages? . . . That much, eh? . . . Well, maybe if I sell my kid brother. . ."

The loyalty and strangeness of *Nu Ormene1* fans, as evidenced by their letters of comment on THRESHOLD and the other previously published works.

Being almost the only *Nu Ormene1* fan at FebCon '78 who did not read "those infamous three pages" from the first ALKARIN WARLORD draft, and hearing everybody else whisper, "You mean Winston's going to let you publish that?!"

Eight thousand calls to my printer, asking "What would it cost to print five hundred copies of only 160 pages? . . . That much, eh?"

Trying to lease my kid brother.

Getting a phone call from Carol and Fern, tearfully saying, "Win, we don't think we're going to meet our own deadline. . ."

And believe me, the above is just the barest bones of a synopsis concerning how ALKARIN WARLORD reached the printer. But on the plus side is a lot of phone calls and evenings of being fortunate enough to have a part in a beautifully complex creative process. I have sampled most of the other 'Klingon universes' (and have been inspired and helped by Carol and Fern in turning out some Klingon fiction of my own), and still consider *Nu Ormene1* to be the most well-thought-out and executed series of them all.

If ALKARIN WARLORD is your introduction to *Nu Ormene1*, you are about to enter a feast. But I believe that most of this zine's readers are already loyal followers of *krasaia Tertemisar*.

Enjoy.

--Winston A. Howlett
Editor and Publisher

Authors' Foreword

We are sitting in our hotel room at August Party. This morning someone heard our names and said, "Oh, I know you. You write that Klingon stuff. I've read some of it." Didn't say what she thought of it, of course. So it goes. . .

This has been a crazy year. Threshold came out in January. Between Threshold and Alkarin Warlord, we did four short stories, poetry, artwork, music and various other things. After Warlord, we have one more story commitment, and then we can rest a little while--maybe a week if we're lucky.

This year we also started the reprint service. Its greatest reward for us has been the opportunity to correspond with *Nu Ormene1* readers. The questions asked of us are many and varied, simple and complex. Possibly the most common question raised is "Why Klingons?"

Nu Ormene1 really isn't about "Klingons." It's about people--social conflicts, personal values, the growth and change of one person or an entire society. The setting--the planet, the culture, the kilingau--is original to *Nu Ormene1*; the concepts are universal.

The above is particularly true for Warlord. For those who have read Threshold, Alkarin Warlord is a direct sequel. For those who haven't, Warlord is set in *Ormene1* history shortly after the revolution that made Commander Kor Kothir into the *Ormen* Kor Alkarin. The Organian sun has gone supernova; both the Federation and the *Ormene1* have been testing the limits of what was the Organian peace treaty. The time has come for decisive action---war.

But Alkarin Warlord isn't really a war story at all. It deals with a deepening relationship between two people brought together, in conflict and love, by that war. The nine stories, which should be read in order, span a period of ten years of history and growth.

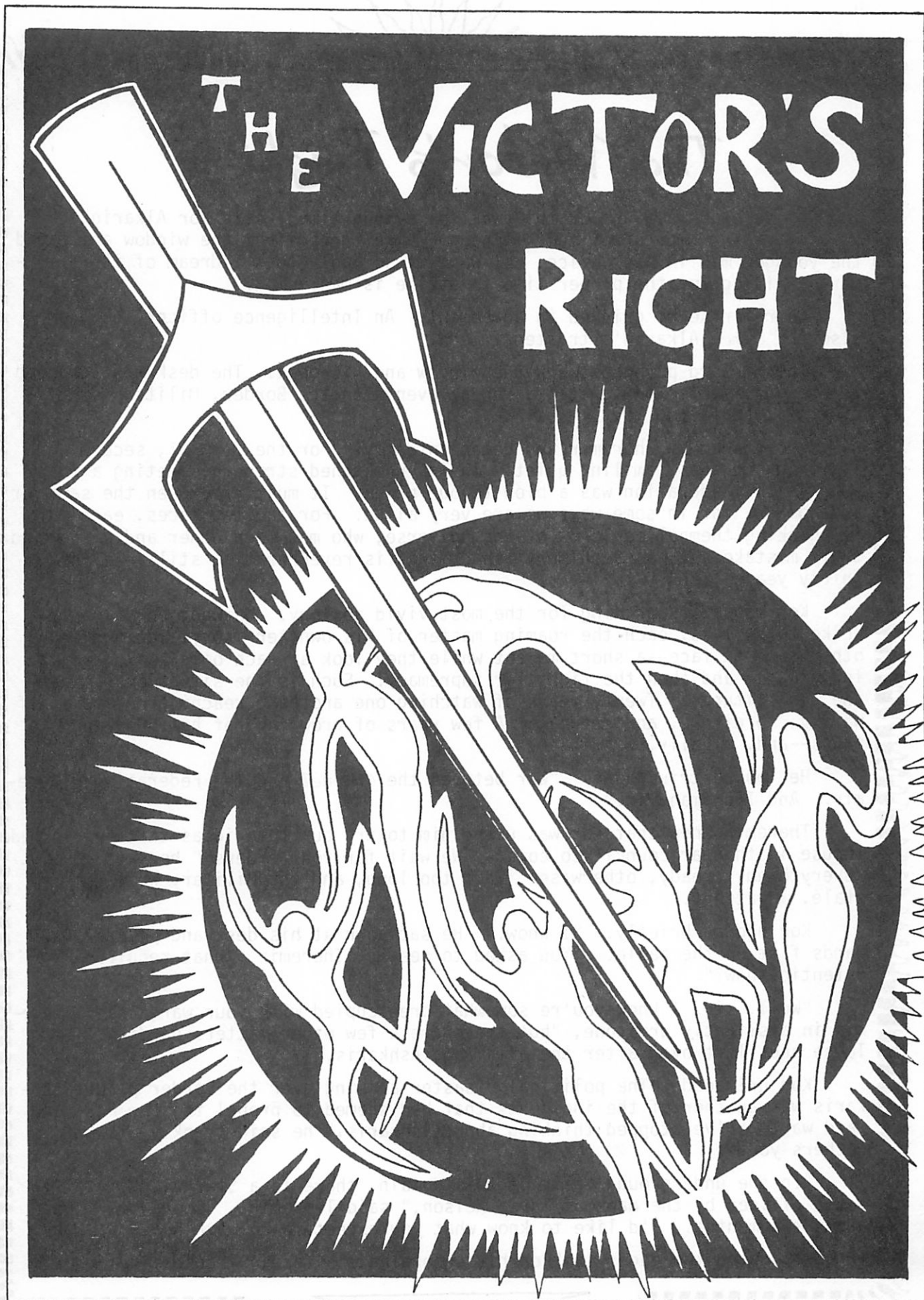
The format of Alkarin Warlord is unique. To conserve space (this would've been a 165-page zine), a new typing style was devised. This helped cut printing costs and kept the price of the zine down.

The four pieces of music have been printed on foldout sheets for easy use. Open the foldout, close the zine (front or back as necessary). The music has been simplified for everyone's convenience.

We welcome questions and comments on Warlord and the *Nu Ormene1* series.

We hope you will enjoy Alkarin Warlord.

--Fern Marder and Carol Walske
342 East 53rd Street, Apt. 4D
New York, NY 10022





The Victor's Right

"I've been waiting for this war for a long time," said Kor Alkarin strongly. The Emperor of the Kilingon Empire turned from the window and faced the younger man in his office. "I want it so badly that I dream of it, Theremir. Waiting for the proper time to strike is maddening."

Theremir Keorl grinned in agreement. An Intelligence officer, he was also the *Ormen* Alkarin's trusted friend.

The Warlord paced between the window and his desk. The desk was littered with papers--notes on strategy, recent events on the Border, Military statistics, and so forth.

Kor stared at Theremir and began intently, "For the *Ormenel*, secure with its thousand suns, smiling quietly in its unmatched strength, meeting a force such as the Federation was a blow to our pride. It must have been the same for the humans, for in some ways we are very alike. For the two races, each safe in thinking themselves lords of the universe, who met each other and discovered their mistake, it was a cultural shock that is reverberating still---almost thirty years later."

Kor paused, searching for the most vivid analogy. He went on strongly. "Like two wolves, each the roaming master of his own territory, meeting each other face to face--a short moment while they look at each other, a snarl, a few growls, and then the fight for supremacy. Such is the situation between the two cultures. Twenty years of watching one another, reaching out to sniff warily, to circle, and retreat. A few years of growling, of half-hearted attacks--and, finally, war."

He looked triumphant. "War between the *Ormenel* and the Federation, Theremir. And I command it."

Theremir knew that Kor was using him to try out some ideas that he planned to use in the war council to come. "We wait for your orders," he said calmly. "Everything's ready, otherwise. Wait too long, and the Military will get stale, impatient."

Kor nodded briefly. "I know." He sat down at his desk and placed his hands flat on the table. "You asked to see me, Theremir. What requires my attention now?"

"Well, sir, I know you're somewhat preoccupied with your war," said Theremir in a slightly dry tone, "but there are a few other matters pending. Some loose ends left over after the affair on Ashkaris."

Kor grimaced. The political disaster arising over the Border planet Ashkaris was another of the incidents that had seemed to propel the *Ormenel* toward war. "I've stopped thinking about Ashkaris," he said frankly. "What bothers you?"

"In the underground cells of this domain, there is a Star Fleet Intelligence officer by the name of Tavia Nelson," said Theremir. "She's been there about two months. I'd like to know what you expect to do with her."

Kor noted the eager look on his subordinate's face. "You'd like to



interrogate her, I suppose."

"Yes, I would," agreed Theremir avidly. "She could have information useful to your preparations for war."

"No, you impudent whelp," said Kor forcefully, but looking amused.

"Sir, she's a valuable---"

"No."

Theremir opened his mouth and closed it again, looking as if he'd just eaten a large gulp of air.

Kor leaned back, satisfied that he'd put the young officer in his place--for the moment. "Commander Nelson is more valuable to me alive and well," he remarked. "We. . . ah. . . worked together on Ashkaris. She's bold, as insolent as you are"--he paused as Theremir coughed--"independent, and self-assured. I enjoyed talking to her. I wonder what her reactions would be to my plans for war, for instance."

"You want to keep a *Federen* around just to have someone to talk to," muttered Theremir in disbelief. "*Ormen* Alkarin, it sounds like you want her as a pet."

"That's exactly right," said Kor, smiling. "A souvenir from the Federation."

Theremir groaned, not quite inaudibly. The *Ormen* gave him a disdainful look.

"Now that you've brought it up, Theremir, I think I'll talk to her right now," said Kor. "Care to listen?"

"Certainly, sir," murmured Theremir. Kor turned on the communit and asked for a Security escort to bring Commander Nelson to his office.

* * *

Tavia Nelson reflected, as she looked around at the cheerless walls of her cell, that she had never liked prisons.

"Is this sensory deprivation, or what?" she wondered aloud, glancing at the shape and limits of her confinement. "I'll talk, I'll talk already."

No window. Bare walls--no pencil to decorate them with. No rug on cold mosaic floor. Narrow bed with no springs. A tiny bathroom with intermittent running--lukewarm--water.

Food came twice a day, accompanied by a guard who stared at her blankly as she tried to communicate with him, both in System English and in Agavoi, the *Ormenel*'s language.

Tavia stood up, and stared at the door. "Even if I wanted to talk, there's nobody to talk to. Damn." She kicked the door, and went back to perch on the edge of the bed.

"Nothing could be worse than this," she muttered. She thought about that statement for a minute, then amended wryly, "Well, I suppose things could be worse."

She got up again and paced the length of her cell--all of three steps. "Here I am, on the Kilingarlan, awaiting--what?" she asked. "Interrogation?"



Confrontation? Whatever they want, I wish they'd get around to doing something." As she said 'they,' she thought of her guards, but more importantly the enemy who'd brought her here--Kor Alkarin.

"Self-loving, devious schemer," she muttered, the image of Kor Alkarin in her thoughts. "I wonder if I'll get to see you again, and tell you what a detestable bastard you are."

Some time later, to Tavia's considerable surprise, someone stopped at her cell. She jumped up as the door opened.

Two kilingau stood half in, half out of the doorway. "Follow meekly," said one of them curtly to her.

Tavia looked at him, as startled by his command as by the sound of his voice. "Where to?" she demanded in Agavoi. "And why do I have to be meek about it?"

The kilingau made a grimace of annoyance. He came forward, grabbed the upper part of her arm firmly, and pulled her along with him.

Tavia submitted, but not gracefully. "But I haven't had my lunch," she protested--in vain.

* * *

Tavia entered the *Ormen* Alkarin's office. She sensed, behind her, the two guards remaining by the doors.

She noticed little of the room, save a confused impression of high ceilings, vivid sunlight, and intricate decoration. Her gaze immediately went to the man sitting behind the desk, and the other man standing beside him. They were looking at her with curiosity and some eagerness. Tavia put her chin in the air and stalked forward defiantly.

"Courteous day, Commander Nelson," said the *Ormen* Alkarin, looked amused and self-assured. He pointed to a chair. "Sit down."

Tavia felt that she could better remain defiant and angry by standing, but she realized that sitting might be more comfortable. She sat.

"We've come a long way from Ashkaris, haven't we?" asked Kor Alkarin complacently. "To be formal, I should introduce myself at last: *Ormen* Kor Alkarin, whom you knew on Ashkaris by the assumed name of Otorok Akharai."

"You're very good at deception," commented Tavia sardonically.


Kor merely smiled. He indicated the younger, dark-skinned kilingau on his right. "And this man, who also participated in the battle over Ashkaris, is Theremir Keorl."

Tavia took a long look at Theremir, and he at her. "The name is quite well known to me and other officers of Star Fleet Intelligence," she said coolly. "In fact, his abilities--his deviousness, his disregard of all law, his special capability in debriefing Federation prisoners--have earned him a wonderful reputation."

"Such a charming tongue you have," said Theremir irritably. "Would that I could cut it out."

"Theremir!"





Theremir bowed his head deferentially at Kor's angry exclamation. "I'm sorry, sir, but I don't see why we should be insulted by her. Let me have her, please--so I can teach her---manners, at least."

Kor ignored his last comment. He gazed directly at Tavia, who was giving Theremir an angry, contemptuous look. "Commander Nelson may say anything she wants," he said pleasantly. "If she wishes to give insult, or provoke a fight, she will only lose. I am a far better fighter than she is."

Tavia looked annoyed. "Your arrogance is the only thing greater than your ego." The jibe didn't seem to affect Kor. Tavia was a little afraid at being in this helpless situation, confronted by enemies. But it would do her no good at all to show fear.

"What right have you to hold me here?" she demanded angrily. "Why am I being kept prisoner? There's no war between the Federation and the Empire."

"Not at this moment, no. But you won't have to wait long for it," said Kor. "The Organians have either been wiped out by their sun's supernova, or are wisely avoiding further interference with us."

"That supernova was a very convenient occurrence for you, wasn't it?" Tavia snapped.

"Yes, it was." Kor smiled faintly. "As I said on Organia eleven years ago, the Organians had no right to interfere. Now, those meddlers are gone, and I have the good fortune to carry out the war that was never allowed to materialize. As soon as preparations are complete, I will strike. Interstellar war between *Nu Ormenel nu Kilingarlan* and the United Federation of Planets will be a reality."

"You needn't sound like you're making a political speech," said Tavia. Though she knew her words would have no effect at all, she was angry, and wanted to vent her frustration. "You're supremely confident that you'll have immediate victory. Well, look at what happened to you on Ashkaris. I hope this war goes so badly for you that you won't be around to make any more mistakes."

Kor frowned. "The incident on Ashkaris was very useful," he said calmly. "I learned what I wanted to know. I also won an unexpected prize." Kor leaned back and smiled, indulging himself a little. "Mine by right of conquest: your ship the *Explorer*, Captain Morgan, you, and the other members of the crew that were kept."

"What have you done with Captain Morgan?" Tavia asked immediately.


"I've sent him to Salao." Kor looked at her sharply; she was frowning, as if she'd heard the word but didn't remember what it meant. "Salao is one of my predecessor's more useful innovations. It's a prison planet."


Tavia found it hard to find words suitable for her fury. She said nothing.

Kor waited for a few moments, searching her with his gaze, looking for some reaction. When she gave none, he inquired, "That doesn't concern you?"

Tavia glared at him. "I'm not going to let you bait me. I---"

"Why not? Isn't that just what you've been attempting yourself?" said Kor dryly.





Tavia's expression was stiff and cold. "You don't have any business asking me how I feel about what happens to Roan Morgan."

"In other words, your relationship with him is so personal that you won't discuss it."

"If you want to put it that way," said Tavia irritably, refusing to be goaded into further outburst.

Kor scrutinized her for a minute. Something she had said, or maybe something she hadn't said, seemed to have pleased him. He continued, "As for the rest of the crew--if you care about them--they will be treated as potential hostages for exchange with the Federation."

Tavia was a little relieved at that. They'd be lucky if they were allowed to get back to the Federation. However, she almost didn't want to know the answer to the next logical question. She finally asked, "And what about me?"

"You will remain here, on the Kilingarlan, in the Rasethi Sarin. Commander Nelson, you are an enemy alien, an officer of Star Fleet Intelligence, and First Officer of the Starship *Explorer*." Kor gazed at her impassively. "However, as you haven't attempted any act of overt hostility or espionage against me, I don't feel inclined to treat you harshly."

"How very kind of you," murmured Tavia.

Kor didn't react. "You will be given rooms in this palace. Though there will be no visible bars, or locks, I advise you not to try to leave."

"That would be asinine," interjected Theremir with a sneer. "A human trying to get off the Kilingarlan, the heart of the *Ormene*? Impossible."

"Mmmph," said Tavia, vowing mentally to try to escape. "Why would you keep me here? What do you want from me?"

"Cooperation."

"Cooperation?" repeated Tavia in disbelief. "I'm not going to tell you anything."

"If you did tell me anything, I would expect it to be a lie," said Kor promptly. "I don't look for information from you, Commander Nelson. I can get far more pertinent and useful information from my own Intelligence service." Theremir smiled smugly at Kor's words.

"Then what do you mean by cooperation?"


"It's very simple: you behave, and we treat you well. Cooperate by acting like a practical, intelligent adult, not an unmannered, excitable child."


"But why could you possibly want to keep me?" Tavia exclaimed, torn between disbelief at his words, and the frustration of remaining here, as a prisoner, for an unknown length of time.

"You're a diversion," said Kor. "I look forward to speaking with you. You're strong-willed, refreshingly opinionated, and intelligent."

Tavia could not find any more astonishment, or shock, inside herself. Feeling a little numb, she just looked at him blankly. She managed to comment, "What do you think I am--a court jester to keep you amused?"

"Yes." Kor smiled charmingly. "At the least we'll be able to have some excellent fights," he said. "I like hearing you talk, Commander. You've





got spirit."

"You say that as if I'm an unruly animal you'd like to tame," she retorted.

"A wild beast, yes. But I think I like you the way you are."

"Oh? Well, thank you very much, *Ormen* Alkarin. Does that give me the right to be as obnoxious and insufferable as I want to be?"

Kor grinned, looking very much pleased. "By all means. But be prepared to face retaliation in kind."

"I expect nothing less," she declared, fire in her eyes. "Being nasty is as natural as breathing for you."

There was nothing but open enjoyment and zest in Kor's expression as he gazed at her. "I'll look forward to my conversations with you, Commander Nelson."

Tavia didn't say anything; she merely glowered at him and bared her teeth once.

Kor smiled, and made a gesture of dismissal. The guard came forward. Tavia, knowing that she'd been defeated, went quietly.


"Well?" said Theremir after they'd left. "What do you see in her, *Ormen* Alkarin? I confess I can't see any reason to tolerate her. She's unmanageable."

"Like you," said Kor amusedly. He stared at the door from which she'd left. "She. . . fascinates me, Theremir. She is like a tiger. And---" he paused as if wondering whether to go on. He added, slowly, "And, she is my last real link with the man now named Roan Morgan, who was once my adopted brother--and a killing."

This time, Theremir stayed silent, knowing some of the history behind Kor's words, the depth of Kor's feelings on the subject. That, he acknowledged, was the only good reason to hold her captive.

A moment later Kor raised his eyes to meet Theremir's. He was smiling. "Well, I think that's enough time spent on Commander Nelson. Let's talk of war with the Federation, Theremir. Gather the war council. I want to make sure of our strength and readiness to act swiftly."

Theremir went to do as he was told, leaving Kor Alkarin sitting at his desk, eyes fixed on some unseen distance, wrapped in thoughts of war. His war was not just the final, deadly clash of great forces, but was also a matter of individual conflicts. And not the least of the combatants in the great battle were himself, Captain Roan Morgan, and. . . Commander Tavia Nelson.





Warcry

The time is right;
the time is now
to show that we have the greater power.

For so long we bowed
to the will of an intruder,
but now we are free to rise in outrage.

For acts of deceit, villainy, and murder,
for wanton destruction of lands and property,
we Challenge the *Federen*--
a Challenge of war.

For encroaching on lands belonging to the *Ormenel*,
for restriction of travel of *Ormenel* ships,
we Challenge the *Federen*--
a Challenge to the death.

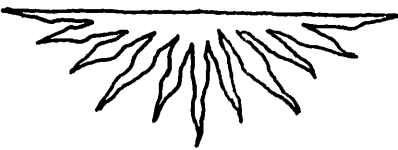
For breaking treaties and violating their word,
for imposing their presence on our lives,
we Challenge the *Federen*--
a Challenge of honor.

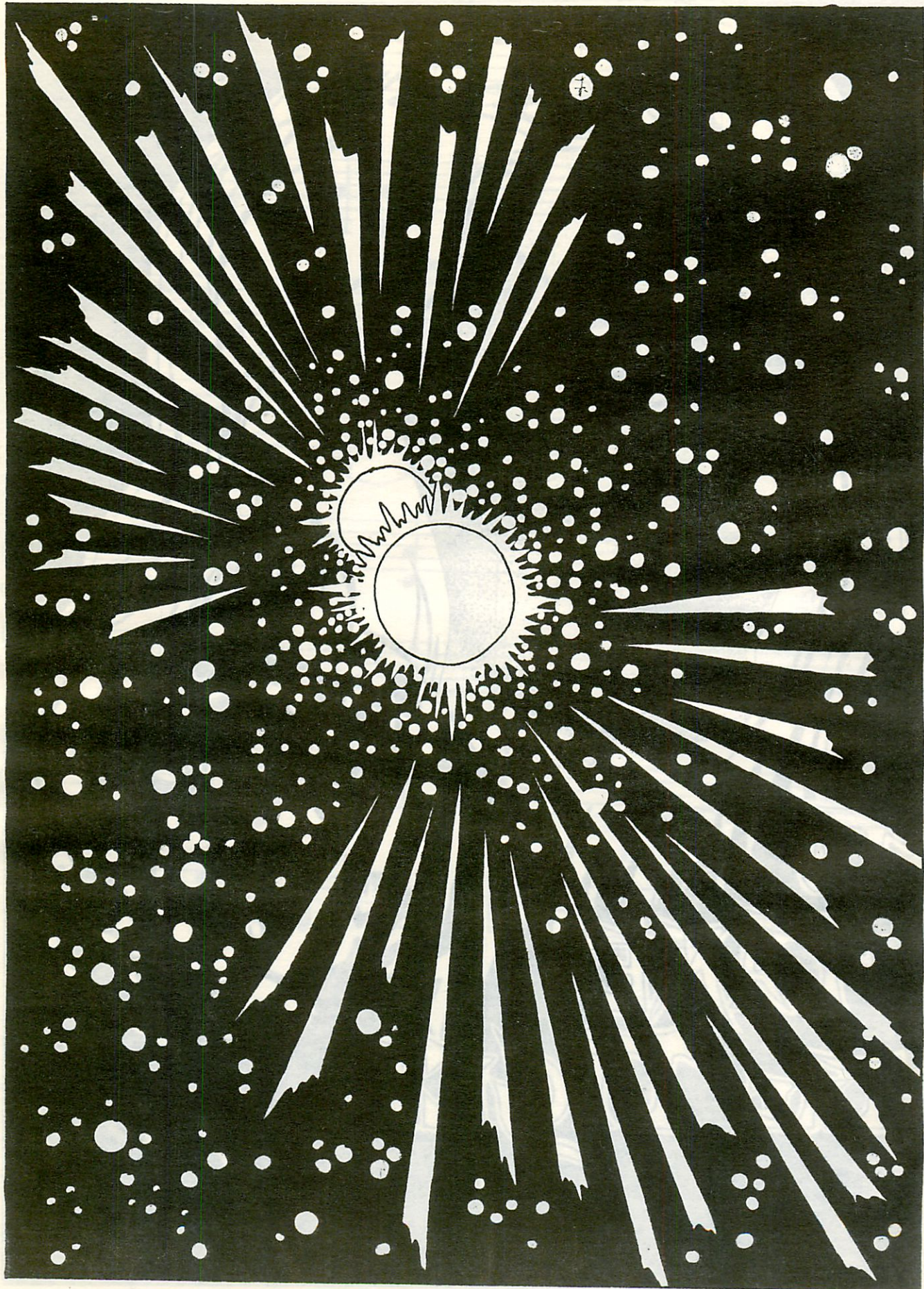
We fight to free ourselves of them,
so that we can begin again--
an *Ormenel* free of the past,
the treachery within, and the threats without.

We do not seek to go to war,
but will not suffer their offense;
we, as they, are prepared to fight
to prove without question who will prevail.

We Challenge the *Federen*
for the right to live as we would live--
undisturbed.

We Challenge the *Federen*
to do the same if they are able--
or perish if they are not.





C. WALSGE

Alkarin Warlord

Musical score for piano, consisting of five systems of two staves each. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano).

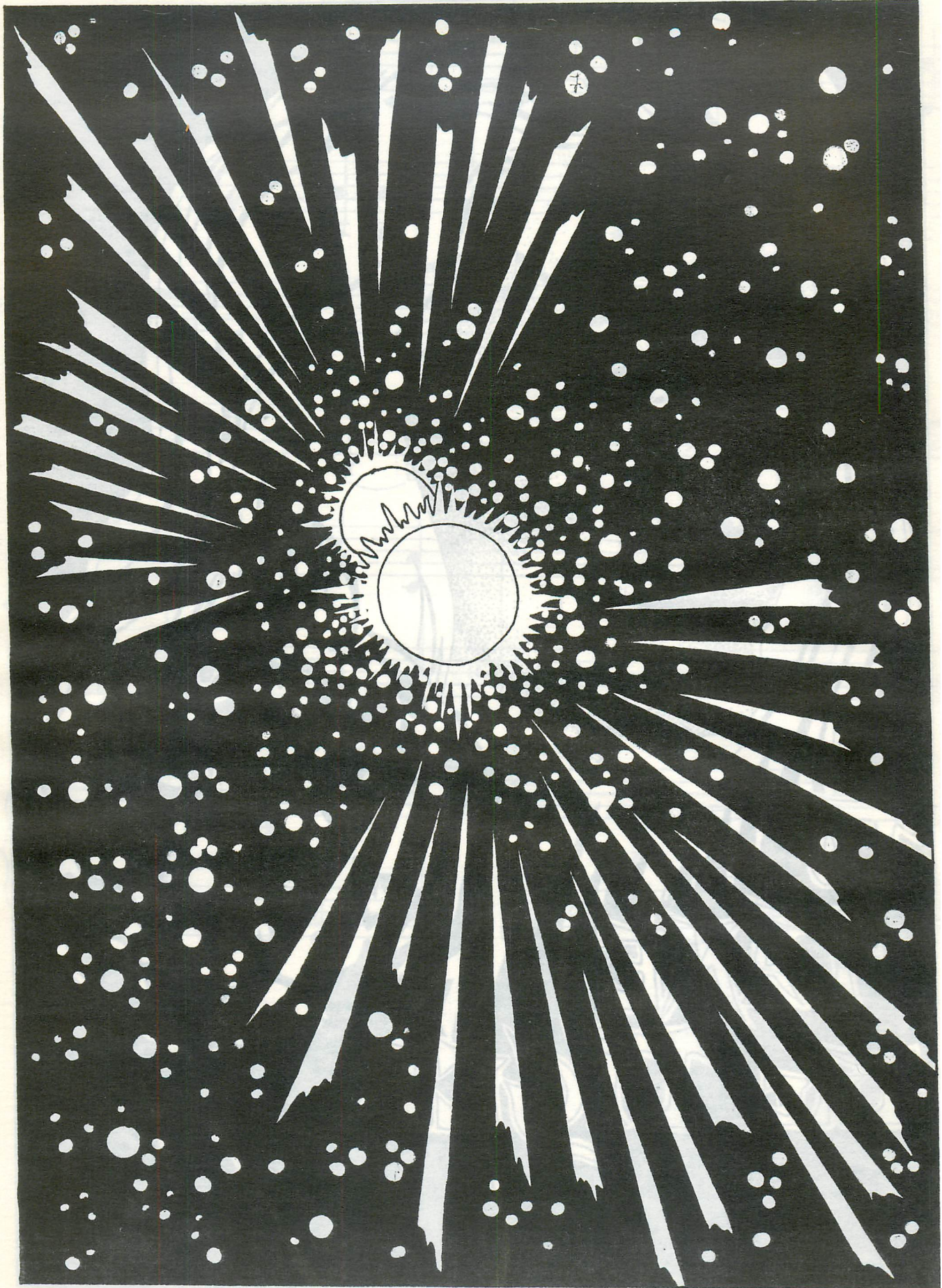
The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts on a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass line consists of a half note G3.

The second system continues the melody with quarter notes D5, E5, and F5, followed by a half note G5. The bass line has a half note G3.

The third system features a melody of quarter notes G5, F5, E5, and D5. The bass line has a half note G3.

The fourth system is marked "To Coda" and features a melody of quarter notes C5, B4, and A4. The bass line has a half note G3.

The fifth system concludes with a melody of quarter notes G4, F4, E4, and D4. The bass line has a half note G3.



Alkarin Warlord

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. Both staves are marked with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a time signature of 4/4. The music begins with a series of quarter notes in the bass staff, followed by a melodic line in the treble staff. The system concludes with a whole note chord in the bass staff and a half note in the treble staff.

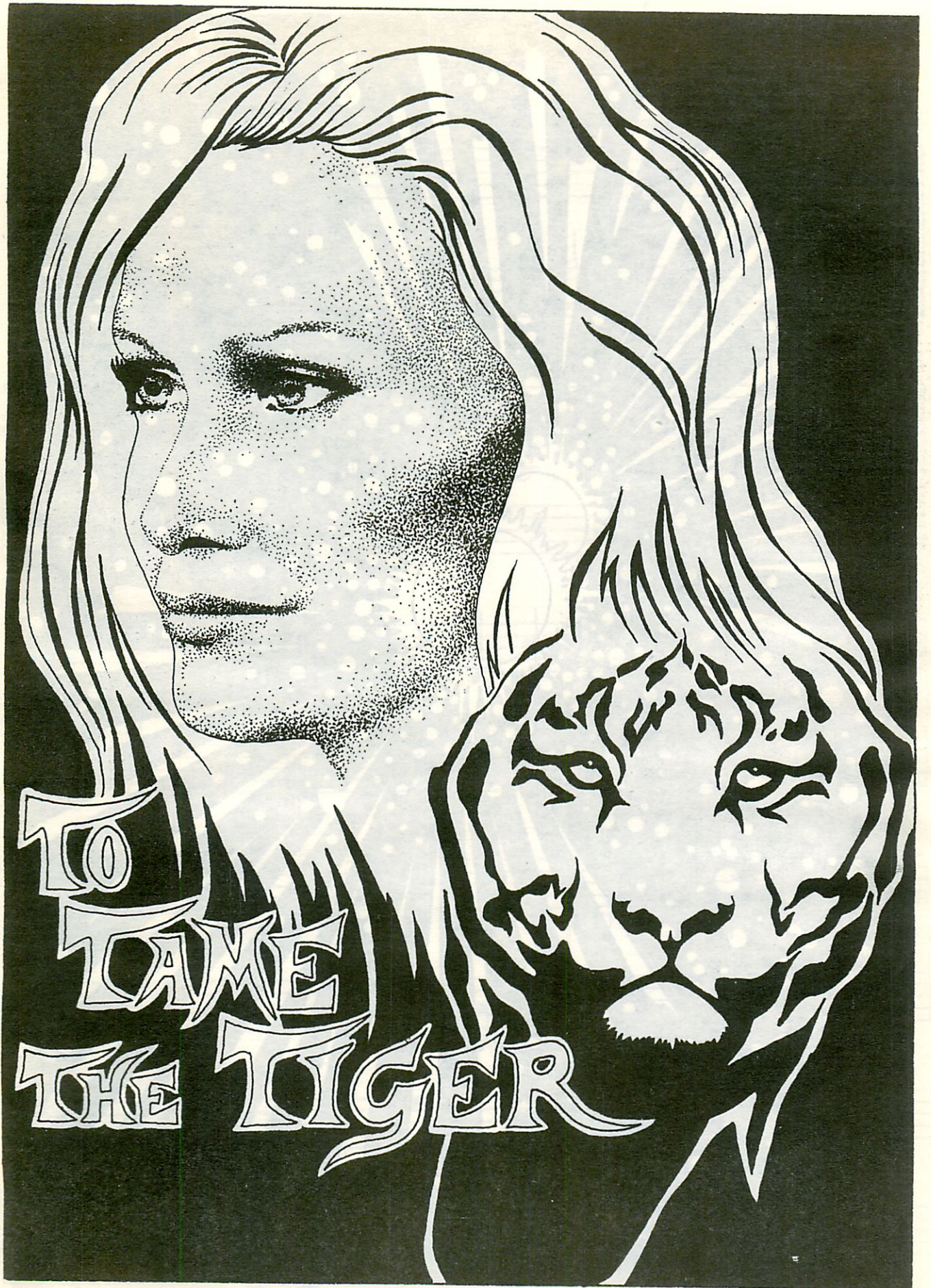
The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It features a more active melodic line in the treble staff with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes. The system ends with a half note in the treble staff and a whole note in the bass staff.

The third system of musical notation shows the continuation of the melody and accompaniment. The treble staff has a melodic line with some rests, while the bass staff maintains a consistent rhythmic pattern. The system concludes with a half note in the treble staff and a whole note in the bass staff.

The fourth system of musical notation includes the instruction "To Coda" written above the first measure. The music continues with a melodic line in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The system ends with a half note in the treble staff and a whole note in the bass staff.

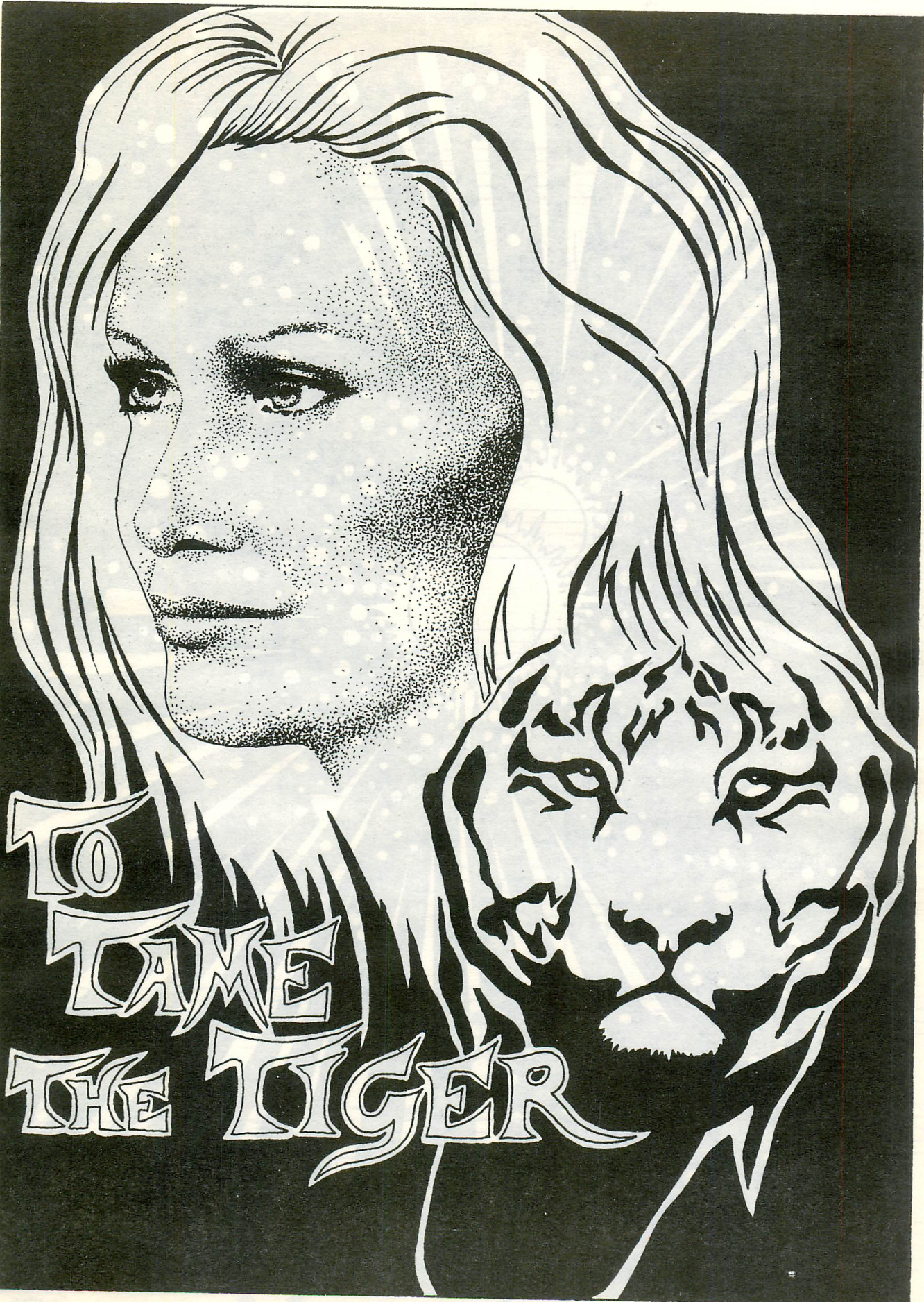
The fifth and final system of musical notation on this page. It continues the melodic and accompanimental lines. The treble staff features a melodic line with some grace notes, and the bass staff provides a steady accompaniment. The system concludes with a half note in the treble staff and a whole note in the bass staff.

Handwritten musical score for the song "The Tiger". The score is written on four systems of grand staves (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The first system contains the first line of music. The second system contains the second line. The third system contains the third line. The fourth system contains the fourth line, which includes the instruction "D. C. al Coda" above the treble clef and a Coda symbol. The Coda section consists of two measures of music, with the word "Coda" written above the treble clef.



D. C. al Coda

Coda



To Tame the Tiger

"Commander Nelson," said Kor Alkarin as he walked into the library, "I give you my compliments on the audacity of your escape attempt."

Tavia looked up from the book she was trying to follow. "Thanks," she said, half sarcastically, half irritably.

Kor came over and stood in front of her. "I would have thought," he continued, "that anyone who listened to our warnings, and then tried to escape anyway, was a fool."

Tavia glanced up again, resigned to not being able to ignore him. "So I'm a fool," she agreed. "Your warning turned out to be true--it is impossible to escape. But I would have been a worse fool, or a coward, not to have tried it."

She got up, leaving the book behind in her chair, and walked away from him. She was full of nervous energy; her movements were tense, abrupt.

"At least planning an escape kept me from going crazy with boredom," she added. She turned to give him a brief, angry look. "I don't have a lot to do--I eat, sleep, and think. Allow me my few pleasures--plotting escapes, and getting infuriated at you and all you've done."

Kor looked at her with faint surprise. "What have I done, Commander?"

"You started a war with the Federation; you made me your prisoner; you sent Roan Morgan to Salao---"

"You're not to mention that name," said Kor sharply. "Ever."

"What are you going to do, gag me if I do mention his name?" said Tavia annoyed.

Kor scowled at her, as if she were an unruly child. "As far as I'm concerned, Roan Morgan is dead," he said curtly.

"What do you mean?" Tavia asked quickly, suddenly horrified. "He isn't really dead, is he?"

Kor looked at her contemptuously. "Why should I tell you?"

Tavia raised her hand to hit him, fury on her face, and he pulled back infinitesimally from the blow. When it didn't land he looked at her coldly and curiously. "Go on."

She hesitated.

"Do it," he commanded.

She backhanded him across the face with considerably more force than he had expected from her. In the next instant she got back exactly what she'd given; she put a hand to her cheek and stared at him in disbelief.

Kor held a finger up in front of his eyes and looked at her with eyebrows lowered and threatening. "You hit," he said sharply, emphasizing the action with his finger, "and you get hit back. Remember."

"All I want is an answer to my question," she said stubbornly.

Kor looked as if he was both appreciative of her courage and angry at her continued insolence. "He's alive," he said coldly. "And if you bring that subject up again, I shall break something--possibly your neck."

Tavia looked at him, and realized that that kind of threat--coming from a killing--wouldn't be a joke. Deliberately she turned her back on him.

The incident over, Kor promptly ignored it. Being an obstinate man, he continued trying to talk to her. "I think you need something to alleviate your boredom," he commented.

Tavia turned to face him again. "You're a pest, you know that?"

"Yes," he said. He studied her for a moment. "You're restless, irritable; you need diversion," he observed. "Why don't you exercise?"

"Where?" said Tavia in tones of arch sarcasm. "Shall I climb the walls of my room? Practice rope-climbing--out my window?"

Kor paid no attention. "Come with me," he commanded, and strode out of the library. Tavia considered remaining behind, just for spite, but she was curious to know what Kor had in mind. She walked quickly to catch up with him.

In addition to the main palace of the Rasethi Sarin, there were a number of out-buildings--offices, extra dwellings, stables, and so forth. Kor led Tavia to the sports arena.

A building stood by the arena. Inside was space enough for tournaments on a massive scale--for the *Ormen's* entertainment, if he chose such. There was also equipment for almost any conceivable physical activity.

"Hmmpf," commented Tavia, looking around. "Sometimes I forget just what privileges you're entitled to. It must be nice to be rich." Kor smiled faintly and said nothing.

They went into a locker room--Tavia could find no other words for it--and Kor brought out two light cotton wraparound tunics. "Put this on," he said briefly and tossed one to her.

Tavia caught it, then looked from the tunic to Kor in amazement. "You really meant it, about the exercise, didn't you? Why should you care about my condition?"

"I'd like to see how capable you are," said Kor. The look he gave her was frank and appraising.

Tavia returned it, feeling as if she had just been dared. "All right," she said. She held up the exercise tunic. "Since I'm ah. . . shy. . . , I don't think I'll change right here. Is there another room I can use?"

Kor raised his eyebrows in disbelief and wordlessly pointed at a door.

After changing, they went out into the sports arena. Kor showed Tavia the courses in different parts of the arena--a woodland obstacle course, a saltwater swimming pool, a running track, and others.

Kor set a test--a test of strength and endurance, of flexibility and skills. Tavia confidently accepted his challenge, and prepared to show him all that was best in a human.

They began with an obstacle race, which Kor won because of his greater familiarity with the course. They moved on to individual feats of skill. Sometimes Kor won, and sometimes Tavia proved herself the better.

After a while, Tavia relaxed and began to enjoy herself. She knew she was capable. There was no need to prove herself physically here. Something else was happening, on another level. Their competition, instead of separating them, made them appreciate each other's capabilities more.

They paused for a break. Tavia collapsed onto a bench, feeling tired but inwardly pleased. Though out of condition, she'd been able to make a good showing. She looked at Kor with a small, complacent grin on her face.

He inclined his head slightly at her. "Well done. What else are you proficient in?"

"Well--all sorts of water sports, but I have the feeling you don't know anything about that."

"I was born and raised on an island," said Kor shortly.

Tavia's grin became a little wider, at the tone of pique in his voice. "You're better than I at all things, I'm sure," she murmured.

"You should practice more," commented Kor. "You're skilled. . . but beginning to get soft."

Tavia sniffed. "I used to be very good at a lot of things." She stole a look at him, remembering that he had one skill that he was inordinately proud of. "I'm even good at knife-fighting," she said, eyeing the knife-sheath Kor wore at his neck.

Kor looked at her with a skeptical, raised-eyebrow expression. "It's true," she said.

"Somehow I believe you," he answered. "Star Fleet Intelligence officers obviously get the best of training. You'd want to practice on me, I suppose?"

"How about knife-throwing at a fixed target?" she suggested.

"Why should I trust you with a knife, Commander?"

Tavia tried her 'Who me?' look and failed. "Frightened of me, *Ormen* Alkarin?"

Kor shot her a dour look. "No."

Tavia smiled to herself. After half a year's experience with these people, she recognized that the way to get anything was to appeal to their egos and sense of competition.

He was searching her expression with his gaze. "I wonder at your trustworthiness," he said.

"You are frightened of me," said Tavia sarcastically. "I won't do anything. I promise."

Kor looked at her a moment. Then he nodded, apparently satisfied. He went over to a row of cabinets along one wall. Tavia followed, trying not to let her inward grin reach her expression.

Kor searched through one of the storage cabinets. Finally, he pulled out a rather old, worn practice knife. "It's not particularly sharp," he

said, examining it, "but it is well-balanced."

Kor pulled his own knife out and seemed to weigh both of them. He extended the practice knife to Tavia. "Here, I don't think you'll be at too much of a disadvantage with this."

Tavia gave the knife a look of scorn--purely for Kor's benefit. As soon as she had realized that he would actually trust her with a weapon, a desire in her thoughts had hardened into resolve. She looked at him covertly, wondering what her chances were of killing Kor Alkarin.

"Well, what do we throw at?" she asked, hefting the weapon carefully, getting to know its grip.

Kor shot her a look, as if there were something in her tone he didn't like. He pointed out a target--a thick round of cork--on a far wall, and indicated that they should move nearer to it.

"You go first," he said, once they'd chosen their distance. "Hitting the center of the target is the only way to win. Victory goes to whoever gets five wins first."

Tavia nodded. The first throw she made went so far astray that she groaned in pain.

Kor looked at the knife lying some two feet to one side of the target. "My compliments," he said, smiling ironically. "I expected you to do much worse than that."

Tavia frowned in annoyance. She was angry at herself for missing so badly, and he was only making it worse. "I did that on purpose--just to let you win," she said nastily.

"But that was no win for me," said Kor reasonably.

"Oh, forget it," said Tavia irritably. She watched him make a clean throw. His knife quivered slightly as it hit home in the center ring of the target.

Tavia looked at him consideringly as he went to fetch the two knives. He was very quick in his actions. His fighting skills had been sharpened until they were almost conditioned reflexes. He was powerful, agile. . . and wary of her. Tavia mentally shook her head and decided to bide her time.

Tavia's next few throws were better aimed, but she could feel the awkwardness and slowness of her movements. She realized grimly that she wasn't going to get anywhere with a knife-throw and began to look for another way.

Her opportunity came almost too soon. She had made her cast first, as usual, and was pleased to hear it hit with a thunk in the target's inner circle.

Kor turned to give her a faint smile of approval, then made his throw. He frowned deeply as his knife hit hers and glanced off to one side. Looking annoyed, he went forward to pick it up.

Tavia, not quite believing her chance, also went forward, and pulled her weapon out of the target just as he leaned over, his side turned toward her, to pick up his own blade. He examined it a moment, as if worried about a nick in the knife's edge.

His moment's abstraction was all Tavia needed. She leaped forward,

knife held high. Her blow landed--a glancing blow on his arm as he whirled with a cry of rage and swept her weapon aside.

Tavia scrambled after the blade, cursing his speed. She came back up with the knife, and attempted another slash at him.

Kor, his expression savage, moved faster than Tavia thought anyone could move. Before she could block him, his stiff-locked arm hit her solidly on the side of the neck. Tavia, choking, stunned by the force of the blow, dropped her knife and clutched at her neck and face with both hands.

"You child!" Kor's rage was savage and biting; Tavia shrank from it a little, as if from another blow. "You are an offense to yourself and this place. You lied!"

"Yes, I did!" Tavia exclaimed, her throat aching. "You're my enemy--- my duty is to try to kill you!"

"Just what did you hope to accomplish with my death? Is the Federation so foolish as to believe that the entire *Ormene1* would fall with the death of one man? On the contrary--you would find my chosen successor far less hospitable toward the Federation than I am."

"That's not the point! It's my duty to---"

"*Astlamash!*" exclaimed Kor. Tavia knew that that was a 'shut up or be hit' command. She shut up, and massaged her throat.

"You pretend honor just so you could take the chance to knife me," said Kor, his tone fierce and scornful. "Why should I trust anything you say? You are honorless."

"I am an officer of Star Fleet Intelligence," Tavia said, very stiffly, very coldly. "I'll fight you at any opportunity I can get."

"Oh?" Kor glared at her darkly. He pointed to the knife that lay now near his feet. He didn't seem to notice the blood running from the graze on his arm. "Then Challenge me if you dare! A real fight, Commander Nelson. With a knife, or without weapons. I would gladly accept Fight-Challenge from you."

Tavia backed away. In his fury he seemed to tower over her, his presence and voice a menace. "I made my attempt, and failed," she said briefly.

Kor looked like he was going to hit her again. He raised his hand, then lowered it determinedly. "You're a coward," he said with disgust. "You look for a way to kill me unawares, so that you don't have to face me in a real fighting Challenge. Dishonored fool!"

Suddenly Kor bent down and picked up the knife. His every movement was guarded, and blindingly fast. He held the weapon tightly in his grasp. "I wish that I could destroy this," he said tightly, "because you have defiled it. You're worse than a child. A child can justly claim ignorance. But you, you have acted with willful deceit and ignoble cowardice!"

"Stop it!" exploded Tavia, after listening to him in horror and fear and a sort of sick guilt. "I can't stand you--you don't have any right to tell me who or what I am!"

"No, you don't have any rights!" shouted Kor, his rage in his voice and his face. "No rights at all! You need to be taught a lesson in honor, before

you can even claim to being an individual." His eyes narrowed as he glared at her. "Yes, you should be taught lessons. Maybe you can learn how stupid, how base you've been."

"All I want is to go back to my cell," declared Tavia angrily. "Or why don't you send me to a prisoner-of-war planet? That's where I belong. I don't know what you're after, in keeping me here."

"I once thought that I could learn from you," said Kor with bitter anger. "I see now that you have far more to learn from me first. Get out of here. Go back to your rooms. . . and don't try to leave them."

Tavia stared at him, then very stiffly walked away.

* * *

Dardanya Atbashar walked down the corridor leading to the 'prisoner's' quarters. She reached the door and mentally placed her hand on the hilt of her dagger, which hung, as always, at her waist. She didn't know what to expect of this Tavia Nelson, but she wasn't going to take any chances. She walked in without knocking.

Tavia started as she heard the door open. She gazed blankly at the stranger, awkwardly balancing the spoonful of fruit she had been about to swallow when the door opened. Finally, she replaced the spoon in her bowl. "Yes?" she said hesitantly.

It was Dardanya's turn to be surprised. The woman sitting in a bright blue tunic, eating her breakfast in the morning sunlight, was hardly her idea of a dangerous Federation prisoner. Dardanya could not help smiling.

She introduced herself, and said, "I have been sent by the *Ormen* Alkarin to teach you manners," she said, as sternly and officiously as she could.

"Oh, lovely," said Tavia, groaning inwardly. "Do you mind if I finish eating breakfast, or isn't that in your lesson plan?"

"Eat," said Dardanya. She waited for a while. After she thought Tavia had stalled long enough, she asked with asperity, "Aren't you done yet?"

Tavia pushed away the empty bowl and crossed her arms in front of her, looking resigned.

Dardanya sat down opposite her and looked her straight in the eye. "There are many tales and legends in the books of the *Orashathnavi*--the codes of honor--which we use to teach young children how to behave. You will be expected to study these stories and learn their meanings, in addition to the lessons I give you."

'Wonderful,' thought Tavia, 'back to kindergarten.'

As the lessons proceeded, Tavia was strongly reminded of treatment she'd received as a child--she would do something incorrectly, and her father would make her do it again the right way. If she'd been rude, or behaving badly, he would make her feel small and mean and of no worth to anybody.

This was exactly what she was going through now. And Tavia didn't like it.

'So what are you going to do--sulk?' a voice inside her asked at one point.

She grimaced. No, that wasn't the answer. Better to meet the challenge the *Ormen* had given her--and make it work for her.

The more she could learn about kilingau, the more she would be able to tell Star Fleet when she got back. She resolved to learn, and learn fast. There was nothing to be gained locked in her room. She was in the *Ormen's* palace. What better place to pick up useful information?

Once Tavia decided to learn, she went to work with a will. She perfected her Agavoi so as to better understand what Dardanya and others were saying. Tavia found that she could look forward to her lessons, and she spent all her 'free' time studying the tapes Dardanya left with her.

Although her lessons covered many topics and points of view, the one subject that continually came up was the meaning of honor among kilingau. Every facet of life seemed tied to the codes, patterns and rules of honor which had developed over the centuries.

In time, almost despite herself, Tavia found that she had become interested in her subject matter for its own sake. She had never really studied ethics and social customs in the Federation, and she was now caught up in the complex reasoning and formal traditions of kilingaven society.

It had been inconceivable to Tavia that this hostile, warring, violent world could run on a code of honor so strictly enforced and universally accepted among kilingau. And yet she had to admit that Kor's rage and her subsequent punishment had not been prompted so much by her attempt on his life as by the fact that he had trusted her as he would a kiling--and she had betrayed that trust.

She thought how ironic it was that, now that she knew this, it would do her no good--she would not be so trusted again. She wished she had known more about kilingaven culture. Roan had tried to tell her, but she had dismissed most of what he had said as idealism. After all, her entire career in Star Fleet had been based on a belief that the Federation and its way of life was optimal, that those of such enemies as the Klingons was base and barbaric.

'But you can't have honorable barbarians!' Tavia found herself torn by what she 'knew' in her mind and what she saw around her. She was forced to question her own values, and alter some long-held opinions.

Meanwhile, Tavia's teacher reported back to the *Ormen*. As the weeks passed, Dardanya watched a new Tavia emerge. At the end of three months, Dardanya was able to tell Kor that his rebellious prisoner had become a serious and considerate student. Moreover, Tavia had expressed a desire to speak with Kor, so that she might formally apologize to him for her actions in the sports arena.

One morning, Tavia received a message that she was to meet the *Ormen* in the great entry hall of the Rasethi Sarin. Filled with curiosity and some eager anticipation, she followed the servant down to where Kor awaited her.

"I'd like to show you something---come with me," was all Kor said by way of greeting. He strode out without waiting to see if she went with him.

Tavia was excited and pleased as they went out of the Rasethi Sarin into its grounds. The idea of getting out of her rooms after so long a time was

thoroughly appealing.

It was a hot, dry day in late spring--and it grew hotter as they progressed further into the wild forest-land that surrounded the Rasethi Sarin. The mountains rose all around them; they seemed to be in a cup of the hills.

After about an hour's steady walking, Kor paused, and turned to look at her. "I want to show you a very special place," he said, "a place of beauty, a gentle gift from this harsh world. I think you will particularly appreciate it now."

Tavia followed him carefully and quietly through a glade of trees. A cliff climbed away to either side of the trees. They were at the spear-head of a valley, and were just about to come out at its point.

As they stepped out from the glade, Tavia was struck by the sight of a waterfall--a high, surging cascade of water that began far above them at the cliff-tops.

The water falling was like fire--tongues, flames, swirling leaps of water spurting, foaming, coalescing into streams of silver. A breeze came off the water, carrying with it a fine mist of clear fresh rain.

Tavia thought she had never seen anything so exquisite. Kilingau, dearly feeling their world's lack of fresh water, had incorporated it into so many of their art forms and modes of thought that the symbol of water had become almost a tangible, spiritual gift of life and joy. There were fountains, and carefully asymmetrical water-gardens, and delicate and subtle reminders of water everywhere. But nowhere had she seen a display of such striking power and beauty.

After a long moment of silence, Kor turned to her. "I understand from Dardanya that you have learned quickly and well," he commented. He eyed her and waited.

Tavia cleared her throat. "*Ormen* Alkarin. . . I'd like to apologize for my dishonorable behavior at our last meeting."

Kor stood, unmoved. His only reaction had been to nod thoughtfully at the word 'apologize.' He did not appear inclined to say anything.

"I understand now the extent of my wrong," she said. "Believe me, it couldn't happen again."

Kor looked at her, a bit skeptically. "Go on," he said.

Tavia had hoped that, once she began, it would become easier. She was wrong. "I understand now what you meant about honor and cowardice. I was a coward. I was afraid to admit that I. . . that the Federation might have been wrong, that there might be some good here in the *Ormenel*."

Kor grimaced. "I don't doubt that your propaganda about us is as forceful as our own about you."

Tavia looked at him, startled. Then she shook her head. "When I first came here, I wouldn't have believed it possible for you to admit something like that. And now, I'd have been surprised if you hadn't."

For the first time, Kor's expression relaxed into amusement. "So, kilingau are now allowed to be honest?"

"Yes, and so am I--about kilingau and myself." Tavia felt a rush of

energy and purpose. "Honor is such a tangible thing, here. I never knew it was possible to measure every action, every thought against a scale of honor. I never looked at people's interactions before as I do now."

Kor smiled slightly at her enthusiasm. "Welcome to the Kilingarlan."

Tavia, a little embarrassed, smiled back. "Thank you," she said.

Kor sat down on the ground next to the pool of water and indicated that Tavia should join him. Then he said, "Tell me what else you have learned."

He asked her questions about daily life, common etiquette and interactions. She answered each question fully and with depth. More, she showed a keen interest in and regard for the rules of courtesy and honor. She considered all alternatives and raised her own questions in a way that made Kor think of a young child hungrily absorbing the words of his mentor.

They talked this way for over an hour, Kor raising issues, Tavia answering. She made no errors, although Kor did not always agree with some of her interpretations, interpretations growing out of many years of Federation life.

After one particularly long debate over violent and verbal Challenges, Kor paused and smiled at Tavia widely. "Commander Nelson, I compliment you. You have come to an understanding of kilingaven culture. . . worthy of a kiling."

Tavia grinned. For the first time in many weeks, she felt a surge of accomplishment and triumph.

Kor obviously shared her pleasure. He glanced at the water, then at her. "Would you wish to go swimming?" he asked.

Tavia had some idea, now, of the significance of his gesture--his excitement, enjoyment and willingness to share valued water with her--but she did not want to do anything that might be taken as a commitment of any kind. She smiled and shook her head. "I appreciate your offer, but no," she said politely. "You go ahead."

Kor gave her a quick glance, looking as if he surmised her reason. In one swift move, he pulled off his tunic and plunged into the pool. Tavia watched his form, brown and sleek and wet like a diving otter, slipping in and out of the water.

The Warlord looked very much at home there. He had shown himself to be a creature of sunlight, and fire, and now of water of life. The imagery of that contrast--his fierce, vivid darkness, the sun-fired heat of his body, in apposition to the light and life-giving water, stirred Tavia.

Kor came out of the water. Tavia had heard silly jokes about kilingau absorbing water like sponges, and for a moment her lips twitched, repressing a smile, for it was apparently true. Kor's hair was completely soaked; even his eyebrows were dripping, bedraggled. Every hair on his well-furred body seemed to retain a droplet of water. He sat down near Tavia and regarded her with a small proud smile on his face. He looked aglow with exhilaration; the water was like heady wine to him.

"We shall get along well enough, it would seem," he said, amusedly.

"In spite of everything and against all odds, yes," said Tavia, a little wryly.

Kor lay back on the grass. The sun had already begun to dry him.

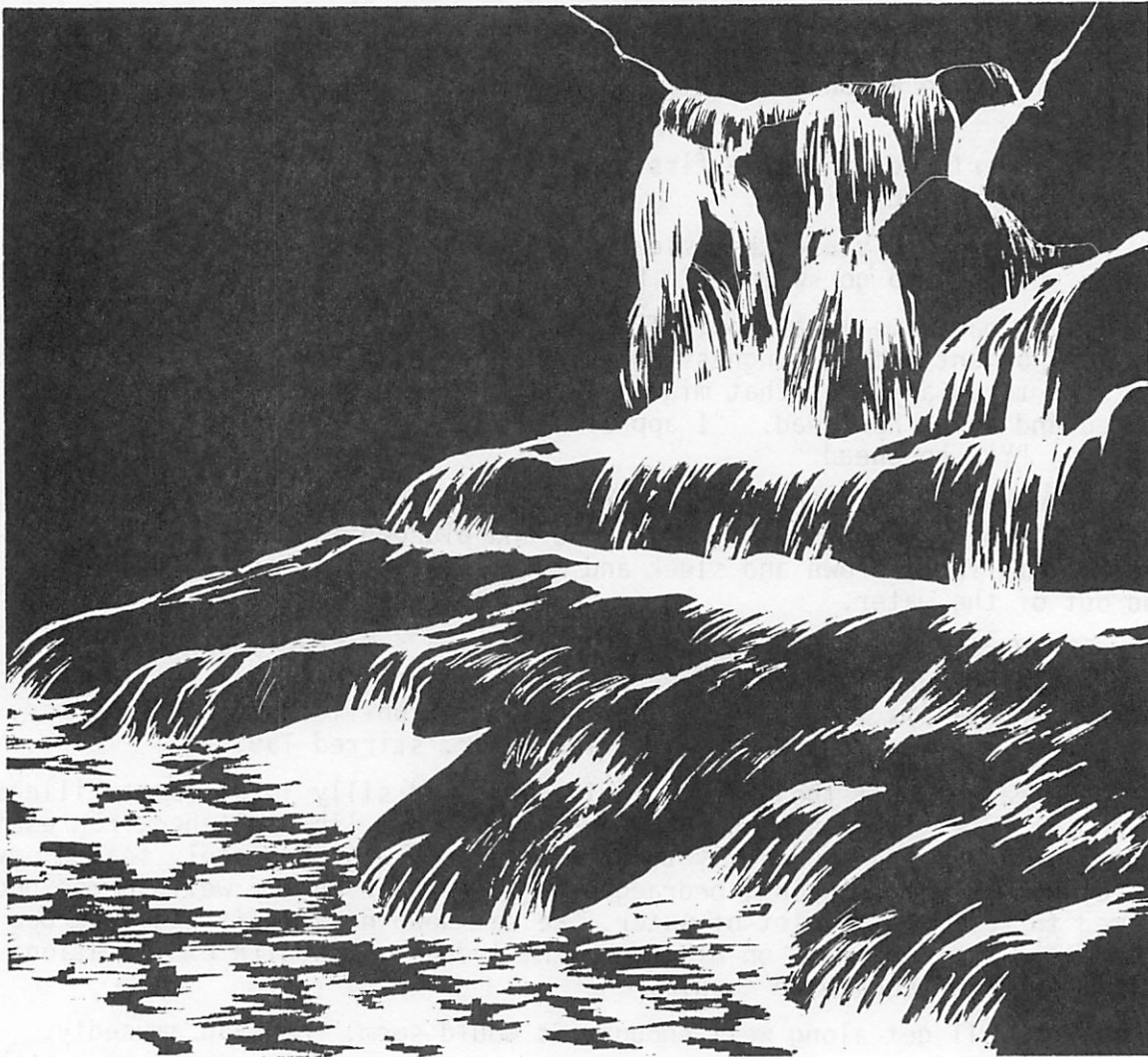
Tavia surveyed him. This moment of peace seemed as good a time as any to ask an awkward question. "What happens when the war ends? Do I stay here the rest of my life?"

"If we win, you may go wherever you wish," said Kor courteously, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"And what if the Federation wins?"

"It won't matter then"--Kor's voice went flat and hard--"because you'll die along with the rest of us."

Tavia, startled, stared at him. "So," she said slowly. "From now on I share my fate with you and the *Ormenel*."



C. WALSKE

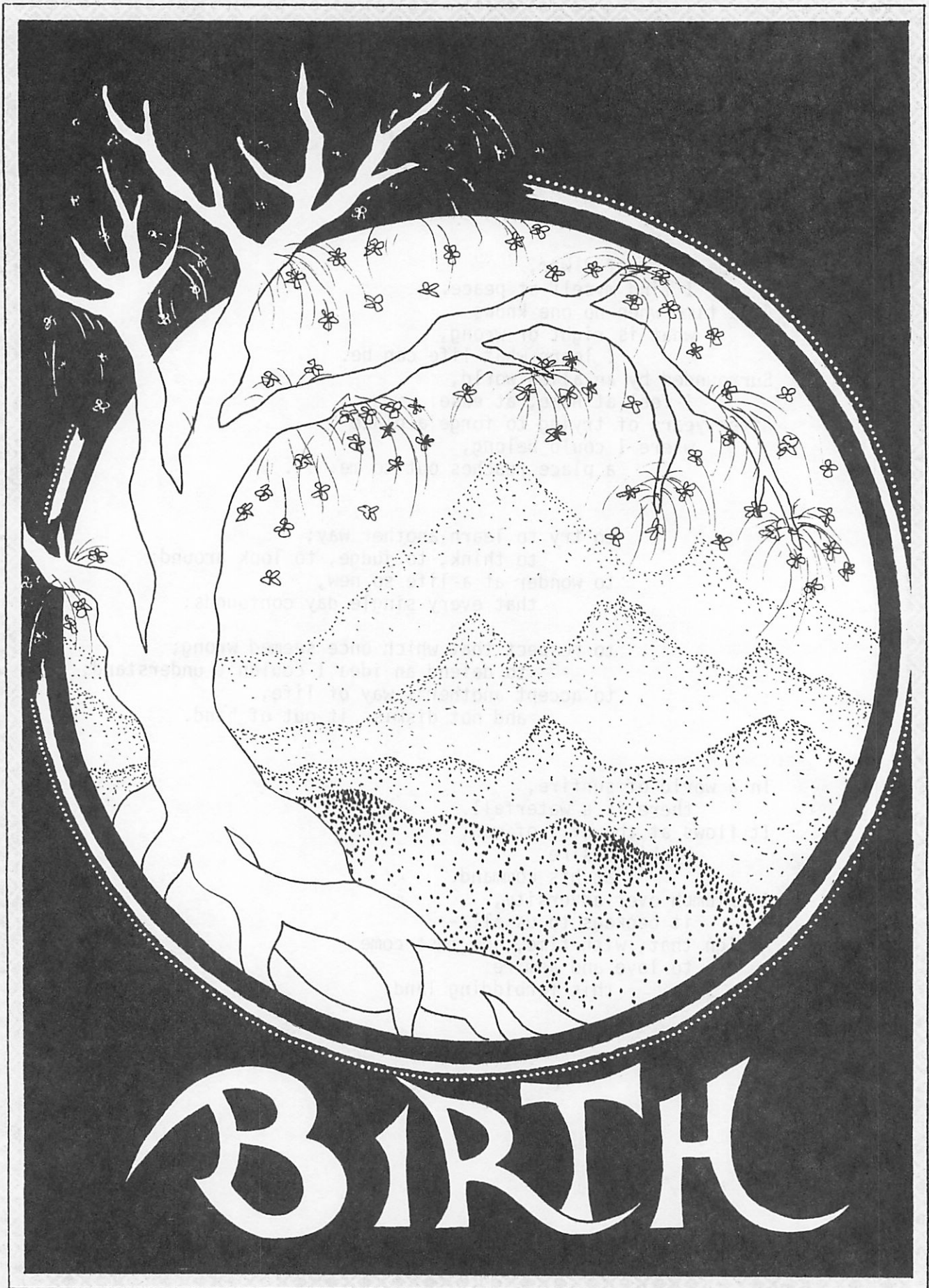
Waterfall

In the midst of a war,
 I find myself at peace.
 At a time when no one knows
 what is right or wrong,
 I learn what life can be.
 Surrounded by an alien world,
 I feel at home, at ease.
 After years of trying to forge a place
 where I could belong,
 a place reaches out to me. . .

to try to learn another way;
 to think, to judge, to look around;
 to wonder at a life so new,
 that every single day confounds;

to respect that which once seemed wrong;
 to defend an idea I couldn't understand;
 to accept another's way of life,
 and not dismiss it out of hand.

In a world of sunfire,
 there is a waterfall.
 It flows at the will of man,
 by his desire,
 at his command.
 A triumph over adversity,
 it beckons to us all--
 A sign that, with time, one must come
 to love and admire
 this forbidding land.



BIRTH

Part 1. Dance of Wildfire

Breakfast had been sent up to Kor--a sparse meal of fruit and honeyed bread. He glanced at it, feeling sudden revulsion.

He looked more closely at the fruit. It looked back at him--with hostility, he imagined. He felt like heaving the breakfast out the window. "At least something would eat it then," he snarled to himself.

Leaving the food untouched, Kor went to his office. Once there, he found it hard to concentrate on his work. He was strongly aware of the extreme sensitivity of his perceptions. Every noise seemed unnaturally loud; all colors were impossibly vivid and alive. He could hear his heart beating, and felt his pulse racing under his skin.

He worked steadily for a while, in spite of the distractions. The first sign of trouble came when he needed a question answered, and summoned someone on the communet.

After a moment Kor looked at the communet. Its silence irritated him. He punched in a different combination.

When no response came, he stared at the machine in anger. "Talk to me," he commanded. The communet remained voiceless.

"*Ashavanau* Maraku!" swore Kor abruptly. "The first warm day of spring, and they all desert me!"

He recognized that the furyfever was rising within himself. But the need was not yet urgent, and there was work to be done. He tried to study the papers on his desk.

A shudder ran through him suddenly. Kor dropped his pen, the fingers of both his hands arching into reaching talons. He leaned back, his throat outstretched, gasping for breath and fighting for control.

The surge came again, from deep inside, in a wave that spread to the ends of each nerve. It was like a command, so urgent and strong was the sensation. Things seemed to shimmer in his vision; the room took on quivering, glowing hues of light and fire. Kor burned, and sweat broke out all over him.

"Ai Kisu!" The cry was torn from him. There was pain as the *sarasu* burst upon him full fold. Desperate, straining for control of his passions, he called on all his strength. He strode stiff-legged to a window, thrust it open and leaned out into the warm spring air. He took deep breaths of it, and for a time that seemed to still the turmoil within him.

Kor turned away from the window and surveyed his office. "No hope of work now," he muttered, glad to be able to shape thoughts into coherent words. "Kisu bless the coming of the Renewal in me. Praise Kisu, the Mother of Life." He spoke the words sincerely, yet perfunctorily, as if it

were a thing learned long ago and repeated often.

He went back to his private rooms and lay down on his bed, trying to will himself to relax. The unreleased tension of adrenaline still ran through him, making him shake. He brought up his hand to the level of his face and watched the tremor in it. He stared at it fixedly and slowly brought it back under his control.

He felt his fever. The need was a burning flame that would not die. Even as he struggled for control and reason, a waking dream came to him, a furyfever dream. He saw bright tongues of flame. Women ran through caverns, entering into mouths of caves that closed upon them. The tongues of flame and the figures of the women merged. The fire became long, living golden hair. His confused and frenzied dream suddenly sharpened into clarity as the image of Tavia Nelson appeared before him. Her expression was cool and amused; her deep brown eyes were full of secret knowledge. And her hair, the fires of her golden hair, formed a living wreath around her face.

On Ashkaris, Tavia Nelson had spent a night with him. They had enjoyed each other thoroughly. He knew some of the skills she had; he knew the extent to which she had stirred and excited him. She had succeeded in entering into a private corner of his thoughts. She knew and understood some of his most intimate emotions.

"A human?" he asked himself. "Share *sarasu* with a human? By Kisu and Maraku, it isn't fair!" he exclaimed. "Why do I want Tavia Nelson?"

But he could not deny his desires. The tension inside him was growing. "Why do I stand here so indecisive and cowardly?" he said irritably. Grim determination in his expression, he headed out the door.

Kor strode up to the door of Tavia's rooms. He boldly walked in without knocking.

Tavia put her book aside as he walked in. Her expression was quizzical as she surveyed him from head to foot. "Thanks for not knocking. What do you want?"

"I. . ." His thought died. For once in his life, Kor was at a loss to know what to say. "I have an unusual and bold request," he said finally, frowning. "I need to share pleasure with you."

Tavia gaped at him. She closed her mouth, realizing that 'You've got to be kidding!' would not be a very intelligent or tactful reaction. She took a deep breath. "Ah. . . why don't you close the door?" she suggested.

Kor glanced at her, then turned on his heel and thrust the door shut. The door did not exactly slam closed, but Tavia got that impression. She wondered a little at his fierce energy. "What. . . ah. . . prompted this?"

The killing grimaced. His movements were abrupt, almost awkward. He seemed to have lost all his grace and pride. "In the spring we killingau feel a. . . change. . . the furyfever, the Renewal---the *sarasu*."

Tavia didn't know quite how to swallow his statement. "Are you trying to say 'mating season'?" she asked in disbelief.

"Yes."

"Kilingau go into heat once a year?" she continued, hoping that if she

repeated it enough times, it would sink in. "And you want me as your partner?"

"That's right," said Kor impatiently.

Tavia tossed her head back and laughed at the sheer absurdity of the situation. "That's delightful," she said mockingly. "Why me?"

Kor hesitated. "I don't know. Perhaps it's your differences--they intrigue me, beckon to me. You're very, very alien--and yet we talk to one another, pleasantly, agreeably, and find things to appreciate in each other."

"I find it wonderfully ironic that you, as a killing, should be drawn to me, a human prisoner," said Tavia. "Now there's a subtle kind of vengeance that I can thoroughly appreciate."

Kor had hissed at the word 'vengeance,' and was now staring at her, wrathfully. His color was high. "Yes, that's one way to put it," he said.

Tavia looked at him, coolly. "You don't really expect me to do this for you, do you? Go find someone of your own kind."

"I don't want anyone else." Kor looked acutely uncomfortable. It seemed as if any escape from this predicament would be a good one.

"That's a pity," said Tavia without much feeling. "But I'm not interested. Leave me alone."

The look of pain that appeared for a moment in Kor's eyes was all the reaction he allowed himself. He would not ask further, or plead. He turned and left.

Kor's words, and that last look of desperation on his face, preyed on Tavia's mind. She thought about Kor, and her position, for a long while. Finally, in mid-afternoon, she went to see him.

Kor was alone in his rooms. He looked up with sharp surprise as Tavia walked in unannounced. He rose from his bed. "What do you want here?" he asked, frowning irritably.

This was the first time Tavia had ever been in the *Ormen's* private rooms, but she was in no mood to appreciate the setting.

"I came because I had to," she said, her jaw set.

Kor looked away and didn't answer her. Tavia noticed that some of his vividness, his restless power, had left him. He no longer looked hungry; he simply looked tired.

"I came to say I'm sorry," Tavia said without hesitation. "I hope you realize what an impossible position you put me in, asking me to make such a decision so. . . abruptly. But, I see now that I was overly short with you, too."

Kor stood, hands at his sides, looking at her with quiet attention. His expression had lost its look of passionate yearning. "I wasn't particularly surprised by your reaction. But, I had to ask anyway."

"I think I can accept that." Tavia looked at him with some trepidation. "Are you all right?"

"The violence, the fire--it may rise again, or it may not." Kor's tone became stronger and more definite. "Looking for pleasure or satisfaction is ridiculous. You and I--our sharing--would be impossible."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Tavia dryly. "We managed very well together on Ashkaris."

His interest sharpened; so did his gaze. "Do you mean to say---" He tried again. "You could be interested in such a sharing?"

"I'm astonished and a little bit flattered that you should have come to me with your request," said Tavia, calmly. She looked at him steadily, not without a certain amount of amusement. "I must admit that I was surprised. Klingons are supposed to enjoy ravishing beautiful maidens."

Kor frowned at her. "I don't enjoy the prospect." Tavia raised her eyebrows at him. "Rape would not satisfy my desires," he added. "Besides, the punishment for rape is castration. The threat of that--I can assure you--would render me quite impotent."

"You're full of surprises," remarked Tavia, a little taken aback by his directness. "I think that's one of the reasons I changed my mind."

Kor looked at her disbelievingly, not quite sure whether she was serious.

"Another very important reason," Tavia said with a smile, "is that I've come to like you." She looked at Kor and realized she hadn't said enough. "I've come to admire you greatly. Your honor and intelligence are evident; your willingness to indulge my needs is remarkable. I appreciate what you've gone out of your way to do for me. . ." Tavia stopped, a new awareness of her feelings arising in her. She looked at Kor as though he had suddenly changed in appearance before her. With obvious conviction, she completed the thought. "A sharing of pleasure is very little to ask of me in return."

Tavia walked toward Kor, stopping only a few inches from him. He did not move. For the first time since she'd arrived on the Kilingarlan, Tavia held out her hands to Kor. She smiled warmly as he took them in his own.

"Thank you," he said simply.

For a moment they just looked at one another. Kor held her hands tightly, as if assuring himself of their presence.

Finally, Tavia asked carefully, "I'd like to know a little more about this 'mating drive.'"

"The *sarasu*."

She nodded.

"After the winter, with the sun's return," said Kor slowly, frowning a little, "our life-cycle begins again. There are many, many changes. . . we become fertile again; temperatures rise; aggressions and passions grow as the forces inside us conflict." He closed his eyes briefly in a near-wince. He took a deep breath, and let it out softly in a ragged sigh.

"The furyfever rose in me quickly," Kor went on, looking uncomfortable at the sound of his own words. "Somehow, my desires and thoughts turned toward you. I was impelled to come to you, as I would to a woman of my own race, to ask for sharing. The two of us would have looked for mutual need and pleasure, and attempted to live through the *sarasu* together."

Tavia gently interjected a question: "You can't go to another, then?"

"No. Not without dangerous violence and pain." Kor's expression was strained. "I could not seek out another without feeling desire, or need for her. Neither would I try to force one who is unwilling. Too many fights, too much hurting, happen when there is no shared passion." He took on an ironic look. "Again, you see why rape would be intolerable or impossible."

Tavia was silent for a moment, trying to understand the ramifications of what he'd said. She thought about the strength and violence that was so much a part of all that kilingau did and felt, and realized that there was both conscious and instinctive tempering of that violence wherever possible.

She looked at him as a different thought occurred to her. "What I don't understand is why the Federation never picked up on the fact that kilingau have an estrous cycle. Of course, there have been all kinds of rumors. . . things whispered about what Klingon guards do to prisoners and so forth--but that kind of nonsense is always spread around about any political enemy. Anyone with half a brain assumes that there's nothing factual or rational about those stories."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Kor, looking at her with a grim sort of satisfaction. "Ignorance is a useful weapon sometimes."

"Obviously. But why didn't Roan. . ." Tavia caught herself as Kor glared at her.

He said through clenched teeth, "Information that is placed in one's mind can also be removed--permanently, when necessary."

Tavia closed her eyes. The thought of the amount of tampering, both physical and psychological, that had been done to Roan Morgan in the transformation from human to kilingau and back to human again, absolutely appalled her.

Tavia studied Kor for a few seconds. A small voice in the back of her mind was telling her that there was something very important in what Kor had been saying, which she couldn't quite grasp yet. She said slowly, "If the Renewal is tied to the seasons, then all kilingau face the furyfever at the same time."

"Within the first month of the year, yes."

Tavia quickly added, fascinated, "And you all go. . . uh. . . mad with it?"

"Some more than others. It affects each person differently each time," answered Kor, looking as if he was growing tired of her questions.

"But if the Kilingarlan were attacked during this time. . ." Tavia's voice trailed off in horror.

"It's an incalculable military advantage. Were we attacked, we would fight savagely and without reason to our death. It's suicide for a kilingau to go into battle during the *sarasu*." Tavia shuddered.

Talking about the furyfever was affecting Kor badly. As much as he tried to hide it, he was definitely feeling his tension rise. He couldn't keep still; he moved from one part of the room to another. When he neared Tavia, she could feel the fever's heat in him.

She asked again, "Kor, are you sure you're---"

Kor turned to her. "Tavia," he said abruptly, breaking into the middle of her sentence, "I can't stand these rooms any longer. I must get out. Will you come with me?"

Tavia looked at him. After listening to him, and watching him, she was very glad that she had made her decision to accept his offer. "Yes, let's get out into the air."

They left the Rasethi Sarin and followed a path that led from the gates to the woods nearby. Around them, the afternoon had given way to evening. Kor in particular welcomed the cool night breeze that played among the trees.

They walked for some time, saying little, enjoying the natural sounds and movements all around them. Then the wind died down. The leaves and branches that rustled in the wind quivered for a few seconds longer, then were still.

In the quiet, both Kor and Tavia heard something different--indistinct sounds of people, and laughter, and faint music. Kor lifted his head, a new, excited gleam in his eyes. For a moment, he stood poised, listening intently. Then the breeze picked up again and the sounds were lost.

Kor glanced at Tavia. He was grinning widely. "You heard it?" he said. "This way."

"What---" Tavia began, but stopped as Kor pulled her by the hand. Half-running, she followed him.

*"Vinith sto evriak,
Enu vinith sto evronnak.
Vinith esewa,
nu kiensi sto chukiak. . ."*

Tavia heard the words of the song and found herself translating almost automatically into System English--

*"A time to dance,
A time to sing,
A time to make
a new beginning."*

The forest thinned. Kor and Tavia stepped into a large clearing. In the center, under moonlit sky, was a dancing circle. A fire blazed high, illuminating the faces and movements of the leaping figures.

Tavia felt the soaring grace of the song and the dancers, and wanted to be one of them. The lilting notes of pipes, and the lovely, throaty sounds of an oboe-like instrument moved her, and excited her. She turned to Kor, her delight and surprise transforming her face.

Kor saw Tavia's expression and gave her a long and appreciative look. He smiled a deep, glad smile and took her arm again. They merged into the circle like gems slipping onto a chain. A strong hand took Tavia's free hand, and the music and the joy of the dance carried her along. A complex drum-beat provided the rhythm of the dance.

"Vothor warms,
 Vinithir glows.
 In passion and need
 the *sarasu* grows."

The singing stopped with the fourth verse. One further uplift in the music and it, too, ceased. The dancing circle broke apart into tired, joyful kilingau.

Kor caught Tavia and pulled her against him roughly. She could feel the heat of his blood racing under his skin. "A time for joy," he said, in System English.

"A time to make a new beginning," she answered, and laughed with him. They held tightly to each other for the length of a hundred heartbeats or so and then separated. They stood, looking at each other. Tavia was vaguely aware that the music had started again; she could feel the drumbeat in her blood. But she could not take her eyes from Kor.

"Welcome, Kor Alkarin!" said a voice. A short, slender kiling who moved with quicksilver grace handed a large stoneware jug to Kor. "Spiced wine for the springtime." The man glanced at Tavia, but made no comment. "Make yourselves a place by the fire, and help us be merry!"

"Joy to your circle," said Kor, taking the jug. "Thank you for your welcome." The dancer touched both Kor and Tavia on the arms briefly, then slipped away.

Kor lifted the wine jug and took a deep draught. A satisfied grin on his face, he handed it to Tavia. "Drink with caution," he said teasingly. "It's very potent."

Tavia threw him a look, and lifted the jug. Her delighted wonder, upon realizing that the kilingau around her were gladly accepting her as one of them, had freed her joy.

The wine was warm from the fire and reeked of cinnamon. It was very strong and very good. Tavia gave the jug back to Kor. "A little too much of that and I'll turn into a kiling in heat," she said.

"One of us is enough," answered Kor amusedly and reached for her again.

They went to sit on the ground near the musicians, a short distance from the fire. Tavia, feeling warm and contented, leaned her head against Kor's chest and watched the wildfire dance go on. New dancers entered it, and wearied individuals left, but the circle continued.

Suddenly, Kor leaped up. He pulled Tavia to her feet. His eyes gleamed with excitement, and a great smile illuminated his face. He put his arms around her once more, and held her close to him. Tavia felt a tremor go through him and saw his eyes narrow to slits as he bore the fever's surge.

"Come with me," he said. It was both a command and a plea. She looked into his face for a moment, then nodded once. Together they went out of the clearing.

* * *

Tavia and Kor's own wildfire dance, their frenzied merging in *sarasu*, had ended--for the moment. They lay relaxed and totally spent in each other's arms, resting together under the clear night sky.

The larger moon, Kirth, was rising. Half of Kor's face was sharply outlined in the moonlight; the other half was dark and full of moving shadows. The light brought out highlights on the killing's dark body. It was a particularly appealing pose; Kor's features showed neither anger nor passion, only calm content.

Kor took Tavia's hand in his. In the half-light her skin, beside his own, looked pale and cold, but he knew its true warmth, even as he knew the warmth of her desires.

Tavia clasped his hand. She accepted the fall of fortune, but wondered at the intensity of feeling that had suddenly sprung up between them.

It was Kor who first spoke. "A human," he said. "Ai Kisu, a human. When I was born there wasn't even the rumor of humans to trouble us. The fact that I, considered to be the Federation's greatest enemy"--he broke off and laughed softly--"the fact that I, the *Ormen*, should meet in this way with a human is ten times ridiculous. I could be called a traitor to my race, to lay with a human. But what does the human say?"

"I?" said Tavia, startled by his sudden query. She laid her free hand on his dark chest. "We are aliens, and strangers because of it. But that difference brings us closer together, because we search for a common ground. When we look at each other, everything is different and new."

Kor gently caressed her face. "You have taken so much from me. My dreams are no longer my own; you intrude. I can feel your presence almost as a physical touch. You leave me wondering, vulnerable."

Kor moved slightly, and Tavia was able to slip one arm around him. She ran her fingers along his back. "So many scars," she murmured, and shuddered at the thought of where all those scars had come from. He had learned vulnerability and compassion the hard way. "I once thought that you dealt out pain savagely and without thought of its effect. But now I realize that you know very well what suffering means."

Kor regarded her for a moment, looking thoughtful. He commented, "Just as I thought that you were without insight or compassion. It takes the spring-fire to show us our blindness and nakedness."

Tavia agreed with him. The *sarasu* seemed to be a time when the full measure of a man or woman could be taken. The whims of the body, and the surge and change of strong passions, showed the true nature of a man, even to his heart.

There was no denying the man's fascination, she admitted to herself, recalling their first sharing on Ashkaris, almost three years before. Wholly alien, yet often familiar, sharing similar thoughts. . . There was a strange mixture of forces in him--violence and cruelty, gentleness and thoughtfulness, arrogance and blind passion. The ways in which his emotions were revealed, the facets she was barely beginning to know, moved her in a way she did not understand, but could not avoid. She had, in her own way, become one with the *sarasu*.

She said, pensively, "On all worlds, the spring is time of awakening. I can't tell you what an awakening it has been for me."

Kor's hand stopped its wandering caress. Slowly he lifted it, and tangled his fingers amid her flowing hair. His look silently asked for more.

Tavia understood, and resolved to go on. "All along I've been trying to hide a growing admiration for everything you are. You have shown me honor, trust, and pleasure." Her expression was troubled. "What kind of person would I be, not to return that?"

Kor didn't say anything. His features showed his changing emotions--hope, pity, and compassion. Watching him, Tavia was moved to declare her commitment to him. "You're very important to me. You've made me see how much I can grow by showing understanding and willingness to share. From now on, I'm going to look for joy, rather than sorrow, and feel hope instead of frustration."

Kor began to say her name, then stopped. He said softly, "Tonight, you are a part of the Kilingarlan. I can't call you 'Tavia' here. Your second name is Kathleen, is it not?" He pronounced it awkwardly.

"Yes," Tavia answered, wondering why he brought that up.

Kor continued. "I would like to give you a new name, to honor your sharing with me, to show you how much you have become a part of me tonight. I would like to call you by the name Katlena."

Tavia's eyes widened. His thoughtfulness touched her deeply. "Thank you." She smiled. "That's like a nickname, or a pet name. May I also give you another name?"

He looked at her a bit warily and nodded. "Well, you can't shorten 'Kor,'" she said, "but your middle name is Arika. . ." She paused, watching his face. "So I think I'll call you Ari. It's a nice warm name that I can growl at you when I'm angry, or murmur when I'm happy."

"Well enough," said Kor, sounding amused.

Tavia leaned over and put her lips close to Kor's ear. "Ari," she said softly, then laughed.

"Katlena," Kor answered warmly. He reached out and held her tightly as the furyfever again began to rise in him.

Nu Evriand Fevesan Getheni

*Vinith sto evriak;
Enu vinith sto evronnak;
Vinith esewa
nu kiensi sto chukiak.*

*Vinith altan hakkindek;
Enu vinith an talaishek;
Tha Kisu tanraishand
nu tawa sto kalistek?*

*Vothor avratsai;
Vinithir aksayai;
Nu av'gethek kieli
u nu kanrak hakkemri.*

*Vothor kulanai;
Vinithir chilasukai;
Ol kamsha tarakinl
nu sarasu inaraksai.*

A time to dance;
A time to sing;
A time to make
a new beginning.

A time for joy;
A time for fear;
What will Kisu bring
to start the year?

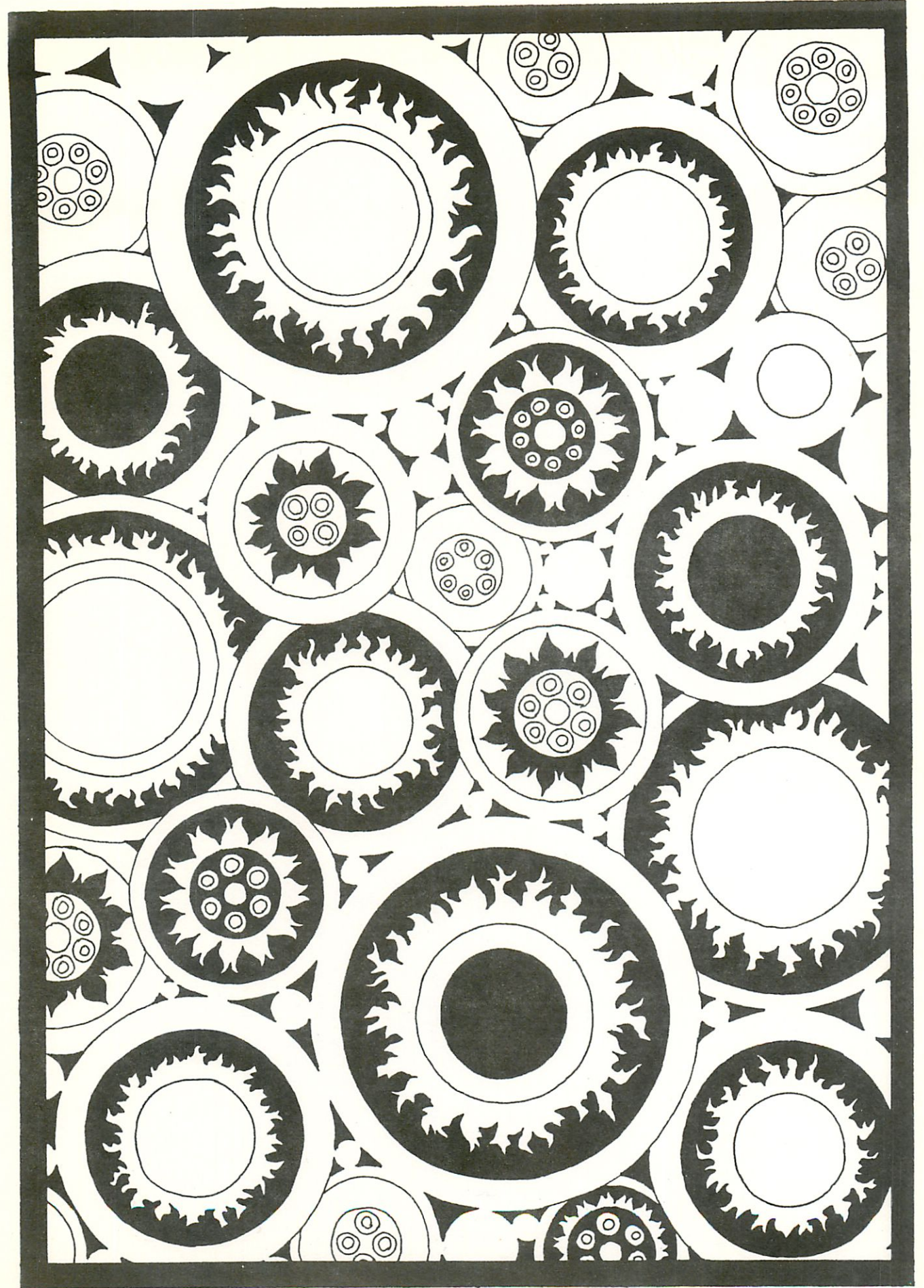
Vothor burns;
Vinithir blazes;
An awakening of hearts
as the blood races.

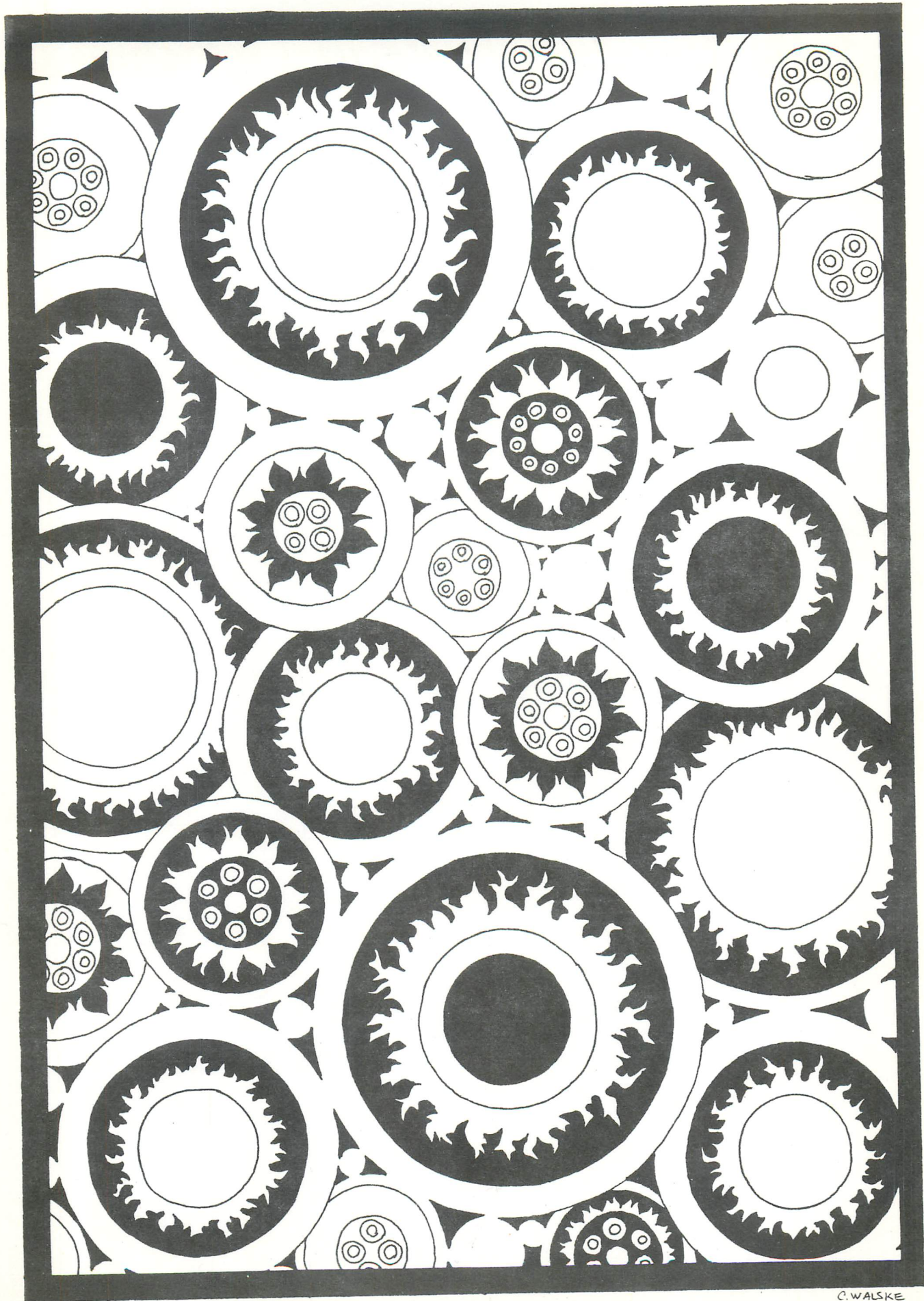
Vothor warms;
Vinithir glows;
In passion and need
the Renewal grows.

The Dance of Spring-Fire

Mu Evriand Fevesan Getheni

Musical score for the piece "Mu Evriand Fevesan Getheni". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody is presented in eight staves. The first four staves use a G minor (Gm) and F major (F) chord progression. The fifth and sixth staves use a D minor (Dm) and C major (C) chord progression. The seventh and eighth staves continue with Dm and C, ending with a "D.C. al Fine" instruction. The piece concludes with a "Fine" marking at the end of the eighth staff.





Mu Evriand Fevesan Getheni

This musical score is written for a single melodic line in the treble clef, set in the key of G minor (one flat) and common time (C). The piece is divided into two main sections. The first section, consisting of the first four staves, features a melodic line with a repeating rhythmic motif of eighth and sixteenth notes. Chord markings above the staff include Gm, F, and Gm. The second section, consisting of the last four staves, features a similar melodic line but with different chord markings: Dm and C. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the word 'Fine'.

Chord markings for the first section: Gm, F, Gm, F, Gm.

Chord markings for the second section: Dm, C, Dm, C, Dm, Dm, C, Dm, Dm, C, Dm, D.C. al Fine.

BIRTH

Part 2. Joyous Awakening

Kor prodded his bed-partner in the back. "Tavia. Wake up."

"I'm awake," came the surly answer. "I wish I weren't. Go away."

Kor pulled her against him, so that their two bodies nestled comfortably together, side by side. He put his arm over her. "What's wrong?"

"I don't feel well," said Tavia wearily. "I'm sore in places I didn't know existed." Kor chuckled at that, and tightened his hold on her. "I'm glad I haven't eaten anything since yesterday," she continued, "because I think I'd lose anything I tried to eat."

Kor gently turned her toward him. "You're perhaps not used to the strenuous demands of the springtime."

She made a face at him. "Your strenuous demands, you mean." She smiled, a little wickedly. "You're quite a man. I think I approve of this season."

Kor grinned. "Thank you." He ran a finger lightly down the side of her face. "I'm concerned, Tavia, that you don't feel well. You should be feeling exultant and proud. Our joy together has been very great."

"Yes, it has." Tavia gave Kor a brief, glowing smile. She lay on her back and crossed her hands over her stomach. She looked up at the ceiling. "But I've been feeling so restless lately. Little things have been bothering me--noises have seemed unusually loud, and odors particularly strong. What's more, I haven't gotten my monthly period in a long while." Feeling silly, she exclaimed, "If it weren't so absurd, I'd say that I might be pregnant!"

Kor placed his hand over her abdomen. He gave her a long look. "Why is that so absurd?"

She stared at him. "Well, I know that you kilingau don't have any reliable contraceptive designed for a human, but I really haven't worried about it much. The odds against interfertility are enormous."

A smile was trying to appear in the corners of Kor's mouth, but he wouldn't let it. "I'm quite fertile," he said, amusement in his voice. "I do not try to prevent conception during *sarasu*."

Tavia sat up and looked at Kor in utter incredulity and bafflement. "No," she said, vigorously shaking her head. "I refuse to believe it. Kilingau and humans can't be cross-fertile. It just won't work."

"It won't?" inquired Kor. He was grinning. The only adjective Tavia could think of to fit his expression was 'devilish.' "Perhaps you should go check with the doctor?"

"All right, I will." Tavia, inspired by astonishment and curiosity, jumped out of bed. Her discomforts didn't seem to matter anymore. "You'll be hearing from me later," she said as she pulled on a robe and headed out.

Tavia walked into the doctor's office on the first level of the Rasethi Sarin. The doctor was tending to a child who had a hurt foot.

The doctor gave the child's foot a last pat. "It's better now. Off you go." The child got down obediently, looked up wonderingly at Tavia, and limped out.

Tavia looked at the doctor. She had a preconditioned assumption that all civilian doctors wore pressed white coats, had what amounted to a neatness fetish, and were calm, serious individuals. This 'doctor,' a genial kiling with hair falling in his eyes, looked more like a storekeeper.

The doctor looked her up and down. From her previous two experiences with him, Tavia had the feeling that he was just itching to see what went on inside her. "I've treated kilingau and all manner of animals," commented the doctor. "But I'm still not overly knowledgeable about humans."

Tavia grimaced and sat down on a chair. "*Pelekir*, you don't inspire much confidence in your patient."

The doctor scrutinized her with his sharp black eyes. "What's your malady? More bleeding?"

Tavia sighed. Through an exceptionally fortunate quirk of evolution, kilingaven women did not have monthly menstrual discharge; it was reabsorbed. No cramps, no mess. . . The doctor had never gotten over his amazement at her ovulation cycle and its results, and would constantly remind her of it.

She glanced up. "As a matter of fact, the problem is no bleeding. By now, I've gotten used to an irregular cycle on this peculiar planet, but two months is a bit long." The doctor looked blankly at her. Tavia said patiently, "I may be pregnant. I don't know; I'd like to find out."

The doctor raised his eyebrows in sudden interest. "You don't know whether or not you've conceived?"

"How could I possibly tell?"

"At the moment of conception, kilingaven women feel---"

Tavia shook her head. "I'm not that lucky."

"It is strange to think of how different you are," commented the doctor.

"Thanks."

"I hope there's no difficulty," he continued, ignoring her; "the odds against a successful cross are overwhelming." He looked at her, sudden excitement transforming his face. "A kiling-human cross! And to think that I should be the one to see it! There are so many conflicting strains to smooth out--so many potential weaknesses in a hybrid---"

"Just find out if I did in fact conceive," broke in Tavia irritably.

The doctor got busy, pulling out a number of irrelevant instruments before he found the ones he wanted. "By the way--who would be the father?" he inquired.

"Kor Alkarin."

The doctor choked, and got hurriedly to work.

* * *

By the time the doctor was through with Tavia, it was almost mid-day. Tavia went looking for Kor, was told that he was involved in war-council, and so resigned herself to a long wait.

They met for dinner. Kor looked at Tavia expectantly as she greeted him, but he kept silent. She smiled at him demurely and volunteered nothing.

Kor was patient--to a point. For a while he occupied himself with his food. Tavia tried to keep him amused with small talk; Kor responded in monosyllables with his mouth full.

Tavia decided to take pity on him just as he drank from his glass of wine. "*Ormen* Alkarin," she said without preamble, "your prisoner has conceived a half-human, half-kiling child."

For several seconds Kor sat very still, poised, his eyes wide with startled joy. He swallowed his mouthful of wine, then hurriedly took more. "That's wonderful!"

"I'm not so sure it's so wonderful," said Tavia wryly.

Kor managed simultaneously to frown and grin at her. "Why not? This is an occasion for excitement and joy."

Tavia gave him the best smile she could muster. "Kor, I'm delighted for you. I know your pride and gladness in fathering a child."

"Of course! I feel like going out and celebrating," said Kor, laughing.

Tavia looked at him. "Oh, do kilingau do that too?"

"What do you think?" Kor asked, mock-reprovingly. "Of course. After the birth of my first son, I was drunk for a week."

"A week?"

"Well, perhaps not a week. The hangover seemed to last a week, though."

Kor's merriment was infectious. There was something so appealing in his expression and bearing that Tavia couldn't help smiling broadly.

"Kor, you look wonderful. I'm very glad that I can make you so happy," she said.

He looked at her with his direct, disconcerting gaze. "You, apparently, are not overly pleased."

Tavia reached across and put her hand over his to reassure him by physical contact. "I'm incredulous that this is actually happening to me--me, of all people." She smiled a little wryly. "I'm proud and happy, but I also see the trouble inherent in bringing a halfbreed child into this world."

Kor lifted his water glass with an air of some gravity, bowed and silently drank in deferential respect to her. "On the contrary. You have proven something that most kilingau would consider impossible. You have created a half-human, half-kiling child--a gift from your race to mine, your world to mine." He smiled at her and said warmly, "You have made the greatest sacrifice, given the greatest gift possible, to me--I love and honor you for that. Be assured that I will raise the child as my own, as one of the *Ormen*'s family."

Tavia, a little embarrassed by his strong words, was still anxious. "That won't solve all problems," she said. "People will still say---"

"I don't care what they'll say!" said Kor strongly. "Whether daughter or son, the child will be of my blood."

Tavia's fears disappeared as she heard his confident answer--the answer she'd been hoping for. "Thank you, Kor," she said relievedly, smiling.

Kor reached out to touch her on the forehead--a *kilingaven* gesture of love and approval only rarely given.

"I'm still overwhelmed by the shock of successfully conceiving a hybrid," said Tavia. Her expression grew more serious. "But what about all the small deficiencies or peculiarities that are bound to show up in such a cross?"

Kor considered her thoughtfully, his gaze going from her face down to her midriff. "Why don't we arrange to have the child raised under a physician's care--in a laboratory?"

"You mean *in vitro*?" Kor nodded. Tavia added, pensively, "That might not be a bad idea. Certainly the safest thing to do."

Kor grinned. Tavia was learning to get used to those delighted smiles that illuminated his face. "Tavia, I'm full of admiration for you," he said amusedly. "You experience your first *sarasu*, and a unique conception, and yet you speak quite calmly and intelligently of what's to come. I feel overcome with passion and awe."

Tavia looked at him in pleased surprise. "In my culture, I'm supposed to be the one who falls apart from the shock--and, of course, the hardships of pregnancy." She added humorously, "I promise to catch you if you faint, Kor."

"Thank you," said Kor, straight-faced.

"I had to find a *kiling* with a worse sense of humor than mine," Tavia muttered, half to herself.

Kor pretended not to hear. "With the child raised *in vitro*, the specialists can make sure it is free of defects. Also, unless you particularly want a blond-haired *kiling*," he said dryly, "we should arrange for some of the child's physical characteristics."

"Blond hair on one of the *Ormen*'s children?" said Tavia in a mock-horrified tone of voice. "By all means, let's keep that from happening."

"Then you would be willing to let a doctor alter the make-up of this child?" asked Kor. "That may involve some genetic restructuring."

"I want the best child we can get," said Tavia sincerely. "Also, the idea of putting the embryo *in vitro* appeals to me. I think pregnancy is mostly a waste of time and efficiency." She went on, with mock innocence. "I don't want to get fat, after all." Kor chortled.

Tavia, having resolved all of her doubts, was now happy and excited; Kor was glowing. By tacit consent, they got up from their unfinished dinner and went to each other.

Kor grasped her fiercely, almost hungrily. Tavia looked at him and

smiled with both mouth and eyes.

"This is the most unlikely thing that could ever happen to me," said Tavia laughingly. "Which is probably why it had to happen."

"I suppose it's part of your long-term plan to infiltrate the *Ormenel* with humans," muttered Kor darkly. Tavia grinned, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him with such wild abandon that he recoiled.

"I never met a man who liked kissing less," she said mournfully, and proceeded to bite him instead. With that, he readily joined in, and they lost themselves in each other's embrace.

* * *

The next weeks were filled with joyous planning. Kor suddenly found time to spend with Tavia--time to make arrangements, to witness the removal of the fetus. . . and time to talk. Tavia had much to learn about the kilingaven philosophy on raising children, and Kor proved to be quite interested in Tavia's own views.

"This is your first, isn't it?" Kor asked one day.

"Yes, it is."

"If you don't mind the question, why have you never had other children?"

Tavia sat back in her chair, and looked fixedly at nothing. She commented slowly, "That's a very complicated question for me. But I think I'd like to answer it--for one thing, it'll help me in getting things straightened out in my mind." Kor waited, looking at her musingly.

"I. . . never wanted to have a child," she started slowly, trying to put her thoughts together. "It would have been too much of a burden. I would have had to resign my position in Star Fleet to become a mother." Tavia grimaced. She glanced at Kor; his expression was one of frowning disbelief.

Tavia went on, painfully. "I would have lost many of my rights and the greater part of my independence. I couldn't accept that." She looked at Kor, wondering how much he had understood.

Kor looked grim. "That makes no sense," he said. "Raising children is no loss of individuality."

"Not here, no. Sometimes I think you kilingau are better off than we are." Tavia smiled a little. "You have large families. Everyone is eager to help share in the raising of children--no one person gets stuck with it."

Tavia thought about the arrangements that had been made for their child. A *sashura*, a foster mother, had been found, who would care for the baby's most basic needs. Kilingau believed in entrusting child care to those who were especially skilled and trained for it. In this way, the raising of a child was shared among the parents, foster parents, nurse, and others who were there to lend helping hands and advice. And both men and women shared in the responsibilities and pleasures. . .

"You don't automatically assume that a woman is good only for motherhood and housewifery," Tavia went on, "or, for that matter, that she's good for it at all, or that men are incompetent in raising children."

"You speak with some bitterness," remarked Kor.

"I am bitter," said Tavia vehemently. "Bitter that I'd have to give up everything in Star Fleet in order to have children. That's the worst kind of imprisonment." She considered a moment, then added, "And I'm bitter that I had to give up all this happiness, the excitement of having a child, to live the life I wanted."

Kor responded plainly, earnestly. "I am glad that you can share the joys of childbirth here, and I am glad to be able to share them with you."

There was something in Kor's manner that moved Tavia to great warmth. She smiled and put her arms around Kor, leaning against him. Tavia mused that there had been many lovers for her in the Federation, but few of them had touched more than her body--Kor Alkarin had a very strong claim on her heart. She hugged him tightly.

* * *

The doctor attending the 'childbirth,' a warm friendly woman with an engaging smile, brought out the sleeping infant. She looked at Tavia; Tavia smilingly indicated that the doctor should give the child to Kor.

Kor took the small person into his arms. Mirthful, he smiled at Tavia. She grinned back.

"A present to you from me," she said softly. She slipped her arm around him and leaned against him.

Kor looked overwhelmed with joy. His smile, and bearing of great pride and gladness, was a delight to see.

"Honor, and joy to you and your family," said the doctor, smiling at Kor's pleasure.

"A son," commented Kor, looking down on the sleeping infant, "perfectly designed to fit into my arms."

Tavia laughed, enjoying the sight of the baby in his father's arms. Kor, looking tall, dark, powerful; the child, small, a shadow of his sire.

"Have you ever had a child who didn't look like you, Kor?" she inquired.

"Well, you must admit that my daughter Koshira looks like her mother, who's much prettier than I am."

"This is very strange," said Tavia jokingly. "I should be lying in bed, looking pale and wan after the childbirth. This way, you almost get 'pushbutton baby.'" She still marvelled at the efficient way in which the embryo, made free of congenital defects, had been put to nurture *in vitro*, nearly eight months before.

Kor looked at her amusedly. "Sometimes, Tavia, I don't have the slightest idea of what you're saying," he remarked.

"Don't worry," answered Tavia, grinning. "I wouldn't have had it any other way."

Kor handed the baby to Tavia, who took him clumsily. Kor laughed at her awkwardness.

"That's not fair," Tavia complained. "You've had a lot more practice at this than I have."

The new parents spent a long while in the time-honored tradition of gaping at their baby. Finally, the wet-nurse was summoned and the son of the *Ormen* was carried off to his rooms in the Rasethi Sarin.

Birth

Life from life;
Kisu is kind.
A son to raise,
and watch grow.

A child of mine--
how strange to find
through understanding
a child can grow.

So much to plan for;
so much to teach him.
With strength and honor
may he be born.

Will I ever
be able to guide him?
Into this new world,
my child is born.

My son, my child,
and like no other.
He will know the status
that is his by right.

Will he know me
as his mother?
I must believe
it will be all right.

I thank you,
for this little one.
Know that I will
greet him with joy.

I am glad
for this, our son,
and know that he
will bring us joy.

BIRTH

Part 3. Song of Life

Tavia awoke to Kor's caresses. His hands moved along her, gently touching, rubbing, and once, giving a slight pinch. She wriggled and made a soft sound of pleasure.

As he saw she was stirring, he became bolder. He bit her lightly along her arm and her neck, and began to use his fingers not to caress but to attack, and provoke.

She grinned with her eyes closed, a warm sleepy grin. She stretched, and moved a little so that her body lay against his. She opened her eyes. "Mmmmm," she murmured contentedly.

"Good morning," said Kor. His voice, always particularly low in the morning, seemed to be emanating from somewhere deep within his chest.

She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Oh--two hours before dawn, I should think."

Tavia uttered a small yelp. "You've got to be kidding."

"Have you forgotten? Today is the day of the birth ceremony." Kor grinned at her. "We welcome the child at sunrise. Tradition."

"Dawn isn't a time when I'd want to do anything," Tavia said plaintively, wishing she could crawl under a blanket and hide.

"Not anything?" asked Kor quizzically and bit her. His hands reached out to touch her--a squeeze and a caress. "Not even to play with me?"

"You beast," muttered Tavia and reached for him.

For several minutes they lay quiet and contented, languorously savoring their enjoyment of each other.

Kor concentrated his attentions on one location. After a few moments, he lifted his head to look at her and remarked, "It's a pity that you can't breast-feed Kirdan. I should have liked to taste the mother's milk."

"I'll bet you would," said Tavia, smiling wryly. She felt obscurely embarrassed. The thought was somehow very sensual, that not only her child but her lover should take from her breast-milk. "It's just as well I can't provide you or Kirdan with any. You probably wouldn't like the taste of a human's milk."

"I think I would," said Kor, and gave her a charming, half-leering grin. He renewed his attack on her.

There was another silence, interrupted by amused murmurs and soft laughter.

Eventually, Kor stirred, and sat up. "We should rise and dress," he said. "I'll go to rouse Karras and Koshira. You wake Kirdan."

Tavia got out of bed, feeling a little more prepared to face the early

hour. She reached out to grasp Kor's hand briefly, and then smiled up at him. They separated, and went off to make preparations.

The birth ceremony was to be held by the waterfall in the gardens of the Rasethi Sarin. The waterfall, in a deep narrow knife-shaped valley, surrounded by trees and flowering plants, was a source of life and beauty to Kilingau. It was there that Tavia and Kor had first made their peace, almost a year and a half before.

When they set out, it was dark and very still outside. The sky was full of the bluish pearl-grey light that it showed just before dawn. That and the moons gave them enough light to see by. Kor, knowing this terrain with an intimate, hunter's knowledge, went forth confidently.

Tavia, who considered the winter weather balmy, needed no more than a dress. The others had put on warmer clothing. Kor had dressed in pants and a piecework tunic of soft brushed suede, which, in colors of tawny russet and fawn, looked warm and comfortable. He carried Kirdan, who lay snug in a soft lambskin blanket.

Kor and Tavia set out in front, walking side by side. "It's hard to believe you're not cold," remarked Kor, glancing sidelong at her and giving her a flashing grin.

"I'm not, really," said Tavia happily. She suffered so much during the summer's heat that the 'winter' was a refreshing and delightful change.

"Mmmmmhh," said Kor dubiously. He looked at her. "Tonight, you keep your cold feet away from me," he commented.

"I do not have cold feet!"

"You certainly do," retorted Kor. "In winter, you freeze the salacious desires right out of me."

Karras, the *Ormen's* oldest acknowledged son, grinned as he walked behind them. Koshira, working very hard to keep stride with him, looked up at him and asked, "Karras, what's a salacious desire?"

"Hush," said Karras, enjoying Kor and Tavia's conversation. "That means he wants her."

"For what?" Koshira went on. Karras ignored her.

"What salacious desires?" Tavia also wanted to know. "You're supposed to be neuter during fall and winter."

Kor gave her a look. "I'll show you how 'neuter' I am," he said darkly.

"Promises, promises."

They reached the place of the waterfall while it was still dark. Tavia was struck by the sound of it, the other noises of the woods, and the feel and smell of the air. All her senses were alert. She felt very awake and very excited.

Tavia looked at the others, seeing that they shared her feeling of eager anticipation. She drew close to Kor, and held out her arms to take Kirdan. Kor handed over the half-asleep warm bundle with a smile; then he wordlessly pointed to the east.

The sky began to show streaks of silver and white gold. Along the eastern horizon the color swelled, and deepened in vibrancy and tone. All of a sudden a cup of molten fire appeared through a pass in the hills, and the light of it spilled out over the countryside.

Kor said something in a language unknown to Tavia, his voice full of joy and wonder.

Tavia herself felt like laughing for sheer delight. The sunlight fell upon the leaping water, and she was aware of its beauty as if for the first time. The clear water reflected back the light of the morning sun; the sun and the water seemed to flow together, gold and silver, heat and life.

She hugged her son, feeling the joy of his birth as never before. A tumult of love and wonder was rising in her, so that she was barely able to speak.

Tavia, carrying Kirdan, went to stand by the edge of the waterfall's foaming pool. The rock under her feet was wet; the spray of the waterfall fell on her and around her. Seeing it this way, out of darkness into the sunlight, was glorious.

Kirdan woke at the touch of water-drops on his face. He gave out a sound that seemed to be part fear, part excitement. Tavia held her left arm up in front of him, to shield him from the water, and made soft cat-noises at him. Kirdan looked up at her wide-eyed, attracted by the sounds she was making and the expressions on her face.

Kor came forward to join her. The sun had risen above the mountain-peaks and was beginning to make itself felt.

Behind Tavia and Kor and Kirdan, the other two younglings drew off to one side, and watched in silent appreciation. This ceremony was an opportunity for both of them to see what had been done at their births. This way, too, they were made a part of the baby's life from the very start.

Kor and Tavia stood, facing one another. All around them was the water and blue-grey stone; a cool wind was blowing in their faces.

Kor touched first Tavia, then Kirdan, on the forehead. "In the presence of my family, I, this man-child's father, give him his name and thus declare him mine," he said clearly and strongly. "His name is Kirdan, in honor of a friend who died in defending my life." He touched the little one again on the forehead. "May he grow to adulthood and return safely from Passage."

Tavia knew that next it was customary for the mother to give the child a knife, in a gesture of protection, but she felt a little strange doing it. She reached forward hesitantly, holding the knife in its sheath, and let Kirdan wrap his fingers around it.

"A knife for Kirdan," she said, "to serve as a tool and a weapon. It will help teach him respect for weapons and his own skills; it will teach him courtesy, when he finds that he may need the knife to back up his words. He will learn when to entrust it to another, and when to swear by that knife."

Kor took up his part again, speaking with some formality. "I also bring a ring for this son of ours. Symbol of this domain, it will give him

a place in my family, and will remind him of his forebears and descendants." The incised silver and black ring which Kor had for Kirdan was much too large; it would be held in safekeeping until Kirdan's adulthood.

The baby was being remarkably good; he had neither cried nor fretted during all this time. He seemed to be entranced by all the new sights and sounds of the great world. His eyes were very dark and wide and alive. Kor and Tavia both smiled down at him, feeling moved to deep tenderness.

The expression on Kor's face changed; a look of merriment had come to replace his serious dignity. He took Kirdan into his arms and slowly walked over to where Karras and Koshira were standing. He gazed at them both with amused, fatherly affection.

"The pattern repeats itself," he commented. "Just as rewards were made to you at your birth ceremony, Karras, and yours, Koshira, I would ask each of you for a gift to your new brother." Tentatively, Koshira reached up to touch Kirdan; Kor smiled and bent down so she could look at him.

Karras was silent for a long minute. He didn't approve at all of his father's new bedmate; in fact, he had already said as much to Kor but had been ignored. He decided to say nothing, for it would spoil this day.

His lips twitched into a grin as he looked at Kirdan, who was trying to catch his father's beard. Karras was pleased and excited to have a little brother, and the youngling was infinitely appealing. He put aside his misgivings and smiled with whole-hearted approval at Kirdan.

"Well. . ." Karras glanced at the youngling, who was staring up at him with bright black eyes. "I'll try to be foster father, or at least big brother, to this little one when he needs someone to run to."

"Karras, you do yourself great honor," said Kor softly. "That was a very nice reply. Thank you."

Karras ducked his head in an embarrassed bow. Unable to remain serious any longer, he went on, grinning. "I have another present for Kirdan. I didn't bring her because she isn't trained yet. I wish to give Kirdan a two-month-old domesticated wolf-cub." He shot a triumphant glance at Kor. "That's because you would never let me have one, *Akra*."

"It'll chew up the blankets," said Kor pessimistically. "It'll teach Kirdan bad manners. It'll get into trouble, and get Kirdan into trouble, too."

"That's my gift," said Karras proudly. "You can't refuse it, *Akra*. Only Kirdan can do that."

Kor looked down at the unknowing child and laughed. "You win, Karras."

"I think Kirdan would love a warm friendly wolf-cub," said Tavia, tickled by Karras' idea. "Thank you, Karras."

"You're welcome," said Karras with the complacent politeness of the victor.

"And you, Koshira," said Tavia, "what would you give?"

Koshira looked very solemn for all of her seven years. "He can have all my used toys," she said magnanimously. "For right now, he can have this." From inside her tunic, which was bulging strangely, she triumphantly

pulled out her favorite, well-chewed, one-eared, whiskerless stuffed eep and handed it to Tavia.

Tavia looked at it, resisting an impulse to laugh. An eep was a small furred beast--like a cat that never grew up. Koshira's eep had once been bright red and fuzzy; but now, after much use, it was faded and sort of ragged. "Thank you very much," Tavia said, smiling. "I know how much you love this."

Koshira looked at it consideringly. "Maybe now I'll get a new and prettier one," she said hopefully. Kor and Tavia looked at each other and laughed.

Kor grinned, looking very pleased with himself and his family. "This is a very quiet birth ceremony," he remarked. "It is wartime, and the family is small, and no one really knows of the occasion. But where I was raised, in *krasaia* Kothir, there were so many births during the wintertime that we spent the whole time carousing and praising the welcome life."

He looked around at all of them, his face full of delight. "I think we should have a feast tonight, to celebrate Kirdan and the coming of another spring." Karras and Koshira grinned widely at the prospect of a feast.

In amiable harmony, they began to slowly walk back to the Rasethi Sarin. The ceremony was over.

Kor looked at Tavia as they walked together, thinking many things. Living was so very rich and varied. It was as if, in a song of war and conflict, a melody of rejoicing of life had arisen. In the midst of strife, during his Challenge-war with the Federation, this fair-skinned, light-haired human had found a way into his hopes and desires.

"Thank you for your gift to me, Tavia," he said softly. "Kirdan's conception and birth, so unique, mark a lasting reward to our sharing."

Tavia felt a warm and profound joy. What a wonder it was, to find love and comfort among enemies, to find a home in such a harsh land. She knew that, whatever ill might come in the future, she would forever hold this time as a memory of love and delight.

Kirdan was the new life to share between them. As he grew, so would they--in love and understanding.

Kirdan

Life
in the heart
of a child of the sword.

Born
of the love
of an alien lord.

Nursed
at the breast
of a mother not his own.

Raised
in the ways
of his father's home.

Kirdan,
my child
who is not mine.

Kirdan,
my legacy
for another time.



An Obligation of Trust

"Sir, we've captured a Federation spy."

Theremir Keorl stood in front of the *Ormen's* desk, almost at attention

Kor looked up from his work. A slight smile came to his lips as he surveyed the serious young man. Kor and Theremir had been on fairly informal terms for some time.

"You needn't be so dramatic, Theremir," Kor said good-naturedly. "Well?"

Theremir didn't relax any. "We caught him about a week ago. He's a Star Fleet operative of some importance. Naturally, we are--ah--questioning him."

Kor grimaced. "Nothing ever changes."

"He's been resisting. However, we have learned a few things from him, including the fact that he has some contacts on the Kilingarlan."

Kor raised an eyebrow at that. "Are there many?"

"A few," replied Theremir.

Kor leaned back. "Theremir, this is all very interesting, and undoubtedly of some value, but I have yet to see the point of this discussion."

Theremir frowned. "Some of his information seems to be coming directly from the Rasethi Sarin."

All of Kor's attention suddenly focused on Theremir. "Go on," he said, quietly and tensely.

Theremir paused, finding himself unable to do so. Kor couldn't know how hard a thing he was asking. Theremir was duty-bound to protect the *Ormenel*, and the *Ormen*, from any potential threats--but sometimes the pains of loyalty were enormous. What Theremir was about to say--though for Kor's own sake--could cost him their friendship, or worse.

Theremir chose his words carefully. "Until we know more, Tavia Nelson should be placed in confinement."

"What?" Kor rose from his chair, anger and shock on his face.

"I'm suggesting, *Ormen* Alkarin, that Tavia Nelson is working for Star Fleet Intelligence."

"Don't be an idiot," snapped Kor. "How would she manage such a thing?"

"I have the highest regard for Commander Nelson's abilities," said Theremir.

"You imply that I don't know her, Theremir. You suggest that each of her words, all of her feelings, are lies. You accuse her of subtle and constant deception." Kor's anger, almost without heat, was all the more

dangerous.

Theremir replied cautiously, "I'm saying that she's doing her job, *Ormen* Alkarin. She's an officer of Star Fleet Intelligence and a Federation citizen. It's perfectly natural for her to---"

"That's enough," declared Kor. It was obvious, however, that Theremir's point had had its effect on Kor. He said wearily, "Theremir, you're a bit over-zealous in the performance of your duties. You see treachery in every corner."

"Only the dark ones," Theremir retorted, sarcastically.

"I will not listen to you slander the members of my household. You anticipate trouble where there is none."

"Someone has to." Theremir said it under his breath. He knew Kor had heard him, and he waited for an explosion which never came. Theremir continued more cautiously. "*Ormen* Alkarin, forgive me for my presumption, but I must point out that you can't afford to ignore this."

"What I can't afford is to concern myself with every paranoid whim you have." Kor eyed Theremir annoyedly, as if daring him to go on.

The younger man swallowed hard. He had to convince Kor to listen to him, or accept having failed in his mission. Theremir looked directly at the *Ormen*. "Does she mean more to you than this war or your life?"

Kor stared at Theremir. Only a distant recognition of the fact that Theremir was not generally suicidal, and therefore must have some reason for his totally insubordinate behavior, kept Kor from challenging the Intelligence officer. He spoke through clenched teeth. "You are like the insect that eats the inside of a fruit and leaves only the shell."

"I'm sorry, sir," replied Theremir. "I, too, am simply doing my job."

"That's one of the more tactless things you've said." Kor did not try to hide his bitterness.

Theremir didn't respond. After a moment, he asked measuredly, "Will you agree to the confinement of Commander Nelson?"

"I will not," said Kor flatly.

Theremir shook his head in frustration. "Have you never questioned her loyalty, *Ormen* Alkarin?"

"Her loyalty is not at issue. I'm certain that she remains loyal to the Federation," snapped Kor. "But I also know that she wouldn't betray me. She and I have a close bond of sharing, Theremir; I know her mind."

"I hope your confidence is justified," said Theremir skeptically, but with resignation. He meant it sincerely. The *Ormenel* could not afford a breach of security--much less a threat to the *Ormen* himself.

Kor tried to put Theremir's words out of his thoughts. But the questions that Theremir had raised, and the doubts that he had expressed, persisted in Kor's thoughts.

After a short while, Kor abruptly stopped work. "There's no way to

know what is right!" he exclaimed, and decided to go see Tavia.

* * *

Tavia looked up with interest as Kor entered her room. It had been a dull, grey day so far, and she hadn't been able to do anything but sit and stare at the walls. "Good morning," she said, smiling.

"*Sinish*," said Kor, not very courteously. He walked forward, a little tense, stiff-legged.

By watching him move, and seeing the lack of expression on his face, Tavia guessed that something was wrong. She stared at him, and decided to ask directly. "Something the matter, Kor?"

He looked at her, wondering which of the hundred ways he should pick to tell her. After a long moment, he said tersely, "Theremir Keorl thinks that you're still actively working for Star Fleet Intelligence."

Tavia stood up, shocked. "What? That's silly."

Kor briefly related his conversation with Theremir and the circumstances surrounding the capture and questioning of the prisoner. He finished by saying, "Theremir, of course, thinks that you're the man's. . .uh . . . 'contact.'"

Tavia, who'd stiffened at the mention of a Federation spy, remained silent. She was struck by anger at the accusation, and surprise and fear at its suddenness.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked Kor irritably.

"No," she said levelly. "I'm not about to be intimidated into making any defense to you. I tell you that I don't know anything about your 'spy,' and that's that."

"Theremir won't accept that," commented Kor.

"You can tell Theremir to go---" Tavia saw the look of warning on Kor's face and stopped. "I don't care what Theremir will or won't accept. What do you think, Kor?"

"I will trust you," said Kor with assurance, meeting her gaze steadily. "I don't believe that you could be a spy--not after being made a part of my household, and sharing what you have with me. You wouldn't betray me so easily."

"Thank you," said Tavia. She was relieved, but the accusation still rankled. She also wanted to know about the Federation prisoner--his name, and so forth, but she knew that Kor wouldn't know, and probably wouldn't care.

She looked at Kor. "Why don't you go give Theremir something useful to do, so that he can't think up new things to get worried about? Why don't you send him out to the Border again? It's very peaceful when he's not here."

"That's enough, Tavia," broke in Kor. "You've made your feelings clear, and so have I. We'll let it stand at that."

"Okay," muttered Tavia, but she had a feeling that the matter was not so easily solved as that.

* * *

Kor's order stopped Theremir from locking Tavia in a cell, but it did not prevent the Intelligence officer from posting a guard to watch her. The guard was often less than discreet. Their presence not only bothered Tavia, but also led to inquiries and gossip among the residents of the *Ormen's* domain. Soon everyone seemed to believe that Tavia Nelson was an active spy for the Federation.

At first, Tavia said nothing. She assumed that Kor had authorized her surveillance to appease Theremir Keorl. Tavia tried not to notice that the servants started avoiding her, and ignored her requests. Her status as the *Ormen's* 'guest,' it seemed, had fallen back down to mere prisoner.

Tavia tolerated the guards, and the servants' hostility, for about three days. Then, feeling frustrated and a little desperate, she decided to confront Kor.

She approached him after dinner one night. "Kor, what's going on around here?" she asked irritably.

Kor didn't pretend ignorance. He said calmly, "We are at war, Tavia, and you are an enemy national."

"I've been that since the day I came here."

"True," agreed Kor. "But your existence was quiet, without incident. Now everyone is acutely aware of your identity."

"Does that include you? I've been here for four and a half years now. And for the last three of those years, I've accepted my place here. I've been honest and open with you, and you've returned that." Tavia looked directly at Kor. "Suddenly, Theremir Keorl says two words to you and everything gets set aside."

"It's very difficult to prove that you aren't doing something wrong," he answered. "And no one else knows the strength of our understanding."

"But I've given you a son. Doesn't that count for something? I've shown my need for you. Would I have done either if I were still working for the Federation?"

"Theremir would call that a good cover. . ."

Tavia stiffened. "Don't give me that. I've been in the intelligence business"--she avoided the word 'spy'--"long enough to know that the first rule is 'don't get involved,' and the second rule is 'don't give the enemy anything they can use against you.'"

Tavia glared at Kor, feeling tense and angry. "I've broken both those rules. I'm involved more deeply than I care to think about. How can you dare suggest that I would use our own son as a cover? How little do you think of me, Kor?" Tavia almost shook with her frustration and rage.

Kor shared that frustration. He watched her, understanding her anger, and knowing that she was right. He felt tired and a little stupid.

"I can't command people's thoughts," said Kor slowly. "Nor am I free

to make decisions that could endanger the *Ormenel*. What I feel for you can't be judged in this battle."

Tavia sank back into her chair. "So I suffer because of your refusal to openly trust me over Theremir. Thanks a lot."

Kor looked at her, pain and deep regret in his eyes. "I understand your distress, Tavia, but you must wait. We both must wait for a solution."

* * *

Kor couldn't know how soon events would force a decision from him. The next morning, Theremir Keorl strode briskly into the *Ormen's* office. After only the briefest of greetings, he leaned on the edge of Kor's desk, stared directly at Kor and declared officiously, "*Ormen* Alkarin, I now have proof that Commander Nelson is a spy."

Kor's hands gripped the arms of his chair as he leaned forward. Keeping all emotion from his voice, he said simply, "Sit down, Theremir."

The Intelligence officer obeyed, however reluctantly. He was too excited to sit still.

"Now explain yourself--without the theatrics."

Theremir tried to temper his exuberance. "As per your orders, sir, we have been questioning the prisoner with a minimum of. . . physical discomforts. That's why it's taken us so long to get any really important information from him."

"I'm not interested in your excuses. I want the man kept alive and healthy."

"Yes, sir," Theremir muttered, anxious to get on with his story. "We finally succeeded, yesterday, in breaking his first defenses. He gave us the names of some of the Federation agents he works with." Theremir took a deep breath as he prepared for his triumph. "One of the agents he named was Tavia Nelson."

Kor almost choked. To Chaos with Theremir and his efficiency, and, most of all, to Chaos with the war that started all of this.

Theremir didn't wait for Kor to comment. "Therefore, sir, I must respectfully insist that Commander Nelson be placed in custody."

Kor stared at Theremir, feeling bitter, angry. . . and helpless. He nodded slowly. Realizing the consequences, he said evenly, "You may imprison her, Theremir, but that is all. Until you know the extent of her complicity, she is not to be forcefully interrogated."

Theremir looked about to protest. Kor added harshly, "If you must, use stronger methods to interrogate the other prisoner."

This pleased Theremir. "As you say, *Ormen* Alkarin." He headed for the door without waiting to be formally dismissed.

Kor stared after him. It was inconceivable that he could have been so completely fooled by Tavia. But it was also impossible to argue with the facts.

* * *

"Commander Nelson," said Theremir as he walked into her room, "come with me."

Tavia looked up from the floor where she was playing with Kirdan. "That door was closed."

"The situation demands my intrusion," he commented, looking not the least bit intimidated. He came toward her. "You are coming, aren't you?"

Tavia detected more than the usual amount of hostility in his voice. "Why?" she asked obstinately.

His expression changed to a snarl. "Just follow me."

Tavia looked at him. He glared back. Bowing to discretion, she decided to go along with him.

"Ama?" The young boy tugged at his mother's tunic as she rose.

Tavia hugged him. "You finish building the castle by yourself, Kirdan, and you can show it to me when I come back. Okay?" She knew it wasn't 'okay,' but she followed Theremir out the door.

They went down through the Rasethi Sarin, into the underground level. Tavia frowned. She had spent her early captivity underground, in a cell on one of the many featureless corridors.

Theremir strode briskly down an echoing hallway. He nodded at one of the guards, who was standing silently by a door. "Open it up," Theremir said. The guard did as he was told.

"Just what do you think---" Tavia began irritably, but was cut off by an imperious glance from Theremir. Without knowing why, she felt suddenly chilled.

The door opened, and Theremir abruptly thrust Tavia in ahead of him. There was a tired, unkempt-looking man lying on a white bed in the cell. He pushed himself up on his hands as the two came in. "Tavia---what??" He shut up as soon as he noticed Theremir.

"Just as I thought," remarked Theremir. He grabbed Tavia and pulled her out of the cell again.

After the guard closed and locked the door to the cell, Theremir let go of Tavia. He looked at her and said harshly, "You do know him, don't you?"

Tavia stared at him, feeling cornered. "You bastard," she said with feeling.

"Don't you?" Theremir looked as if he was about to take her by the shoulders and shake her.

Tavia didn't answer. She glanced at the guards, and the line of cells, and kept her mouth shut.

"His name is Michael---"

"I know what his name is!" Tavia exclaimed angrily. "What are you doing to him?"

"He is a Federation spy. He's had a few things to tell us."

Tavia backed away. "Oh really?"

"One of the names he mentioned was yours, Commander Nelson," said Theremir forcefully. His face was grim. "And he told us that he has 'contacts' on the Kilingarlan."

"You're crazy, you know that?" Tavia, feeling a little desperate, backed up against the corridor wall. "Does the *Ormen* know what you're doing?"

"Don't expect him to protect you," said Theremir curtly. "He has as little love of deception as I."

"I haven't deceived anyone." Tavia drew in a deep breath and looked levelly at Theremir. "If I try to walk past you and your guards, what will happen to me?"

"Do you want to be grabbed and held by your hair?"

"Not particularly." Tavia made a face, trying not to show her fear. "What's next--my interrogation?"

Theremir didn't reply. At a gesture from him, one of the guards opened the door to a cell a little farther down the hall.

"My new home?" Tavia questioned.

"Yes," said Theremir.

"Do I get company?"

"Shut up and move." He shoved her toward the waiting guard.

Tavia went in. Somewhat to her relief, Theremir and the others stayed outside. "Don't forget the bread and water," she called out as the cell door slammed.

Tavia's bravado left her as the door closed. She sank down on the bed, staring at the small room with a choking feeling of frustration and despair.

She thought about her fellow human a few doors down the hall. Michael Laird on the Kilingarlan! What was his mission here? How had he gotten caught?

"Give them a hard time, Mike," she said out loud. She thought about his interrogation--and the way he had looked--and shuddered. She didn't know that much about Imperial interrogation techniques, but she was very familiar with Federation debriefings. They were probably very much the same--exquisitely painful, dehumanizing and endless.

Inwardly she wished her friend good luck. She looked around her, recognizing the harsh fact of her own imprisonment, and wished herself luck, too.

* * *

Kor couldn't stay away from the prison level. No sooner did he receive word that Tavia had been taken below than he, too, headed down through the Rasethi Sarin. Theremir met him in the corridor and showed Kor to Tavia's cell. Kor had hoped to speak with Tavia alone, but realized that the security-conscious Theremir wouldn't allow that.

When the door to her cell opened, Tavia turned toward it automatically.

Her hopes flared as she saw Kor standing there; then, as she spotted Theremir, her smile disappeared. She looked down.

"Katlena, it is a time for honesty," Kor began.

She turned to him again as he used his *kilingaven* name for her. If he could still call her by that specially given name, he must also still be able to trust her. She said measuredly, "I have been honest with you."

Theremir coughed loudly; Kor ignored him. "What do you know of the Federation spy?"

"His name is Michael Laird. He and I worked together at one time in Star Fleet Intelligence."

"At one time?" Theremir interjected archly. "Does that 'time' include now?"

"Shut up, Theremir," said Kor shortly. He looked directly at Tavia. "How long has he been working here in the *Ormenel*?"

"I don't know. I didn't know he was in the *Ormenel* until about an hour ago." Tavia's voice had taken on a decided edge.

Kor glanced, somewhat triumphantly, at Theremir, who only seemed skeptical. "Frankly, sir," Theremir began, adding the honorific as an afterthought, "I still don't believe her."

"Stalemate," said Tavia, half to herself, but then, as she noticed Kor eye her, she added, "and I'm the pawn."

Kor stared at them both for a long minute. Theremir looked stubborn; Tavia was defiant. Finally, he said, "Until we have some kind of evidence, Tavia, you will remain here."

"So you turn me over to Theremir the Grand Inquisitor," Tavia exclaimed contemptuously. "That'll give you all the 'evidence' you need-- he'll take me apart sooner or later."

"If I wanted to kill you, I would do it outright, with a knife," said Kor forcefully. "The pieces of your thoughts after mindbreaking would be as useless as dead leaves. You won't be interrogated."

Tavia looked at him, her face expressionless. "Then you'll have to take me at my word," she said resolutely. "I haven't deceived you."

"It isn't enough for me to accept your word," said Kor, indicating Theremir.

Tavia considered that a moment, watching Theremir. Then she began slowly, "I'm a prisoner here. As a Star Fleet officer, I should be doing my best to fight all of you. But I haven't." Tavia looked at the two *kilingau*, wondering if she was going to get anywhere. "I won't go over what I feel, or what I've done, for you, Kor. But obviously I haven't been 'opposing the enemy.'"

Kor looked as if he were about to say something, but didn't. Tavia glanced at him, then at Theremir. "I can't win," she said bleakly. "You call me a spy. Star Fleet would probably call me a traitor."

The two men watched her. From their expressions, Tavia could see that she hadn't convinced the Intelligence man at all, and she seemed to have

managed to irritate Kor. Her anger took over. She exclaimed, "To hell with both of you! I don't care what you believe. Just get out of here!"

* * *

Tavia paced in her cell. Images of her first months on the Kilingarlan brought a return of rebelliousness--and guilt. Yes, Star Fleet would brand her as a traitor. 'I should have been doing what Mike Laird was doing before he got caught,' she thought angrily. 'Fighting this war instead of trying to ignore it.'

Ignoring it--that's what she'd been doing. She was never one to make herself sick over misfortune; she found a way to live with it. She'd been taken prisoner, but had been offered a chance to have a 'normal' existence. And she'd taken it. She'd buried herself in thoughts of Kor and Kirdan, honor and trust, and lived her life here. And now the war was getting even with her.

"Damn Kor and his honor," muttered Tavia. "I should be fighting him and these. . .Klingons."

The word struck a sour, unnatural chord in her. They weren't just 'Klingons'; they were people. She recalled something that Dardanya had said, over and over in her lessons--'It is much harder to fight someone you know than someone you don't know.'

It was easy to fight 'Klingons.' They were faceless villains. The war between the *Ormenei* and the Federation was being fought on abstract, incomprehensible terms: fleet to fleet, ship to ship, missile to missile. There were few land battles; man-to-man combat almost nonexistent.

Kor was right. It was a war fought on dishonor.

"Why does it always come back to that?" she wondered aloud. The words 'Kor is right' echoed back at her once more.

* * *

For the second night in a row, Kirdan went looking for his mother, to wish her 'good night,' and couldn't find her. He hadn't seen her in a day and a half, and she hadn't come to say good-bye to him before she'd left. And his father hadn't wanted to talk about it, the day before. In fact, Kor had been in a terrible mood, since Tavia went away. Kirdan decided to go talk to his father.

A very weary but anxious Kirdan pulled himself into his father's lap. "Akra, what's wrong?"

"What do you mean, child?" Kor looked down at his small son.

"You're unhappy," said Kirdan, putting his arms around Kor's chest and looking up into his father's face. "What's wrong, Akra?"

Kor stared down at Kirdan. "Is it really so noticeable?" he murmured. "Have I frightened even you, my young one?" Kirdan watched him expectantly, waiting for an answer he could understand.

"Kirdan, I am in despair. Your mother is in difficulty and I cannot help her. Her heart and mind are locked in strife, even as are my own." Kor looked at his son, wondering how soon the day would come when Kirdan would himself discover the full story. Kirdan's own realization of his

'mixed' blood might be a very harsh awakening. . . "I'm worried--for her, for me, and for you. I do not see a solution. Our lives, and our shared love, are jeopardized. We can only wait."

"You don't like waiting, do you, *Akra*?" asked Kirdan, seizing onto the only idea that made sense.

"No, I don't," said Kor emphatically.

"Where is *Ama*? May I see her?"

Kor let out a deep breath. "No, Kirdan." Kirdan looked dismayed. "I'll tell you something though," Kor said with an effort, "tonight, if you like, you can sleep with me in my bed."

"Thank you, *Akra*!"

Kor picked Kirdan up into his arms and headed for his room. Kirdan was smiling, holding onto his father tightly. 'This one is too young to lose his mother,' thought Kor grimly. "To Chaos with Theremir! There must be a solution."

Kor did not go to his office the next morning. He cancelled the one appointment he had and instead took a late breakfast with his son. Kor resolved to divert Kirdan from the troubles that surrounded his family. So, father and son spent the day out in the gardens of the Rasethi Sarin.

When, at the end of the day, Kor carried his weary son to his room, the youngling was quite content. As Kor looked down at Kirdan in his bed, he thought, for the hundredth time that day, how happy Tavia would have been to see the two of them together.

* * *

"*Ormen Alkarin*---"

Kor looked up and saw Theremir. "I'm busy. What do you want?"

"To report."

Kor, annoyed, got up. He walked over to Theremir, noting the look of trepidation on the younger man's face. "On what?"

Theremir took a deep breath. "The Federation spy, Michael Laird, broke down this morning. We have his mind." Theremir looked up hesitantly. "Sir, he hasn't worked with Tavia Nelson in seven years. Since well before the war."

Kor struck him in the face. Theremir staggered back a step, bleeding at the lip. "You fool," said Kor harshly.

"Sir, I---" Theremir broke off. "Sir, I acted on the knowledge at hand. I only took precautionary measures. No injury has come---"

"No injury? To resolve this, you had to destroy a man's mind. You've caused irreparable harm."

"But if I had been right?" Theremir suggested timidly.

"If you had been right, I would have had to kill Tavia Nelson," growled Kor. "And you would be the cause of still greater loss."

Theremir flinched at the wrath in Kor's voice. He straightened slowly. "I have nothing more to say, *Ormen* Alkarin," he declared formally, accepting defeat.

Kor only glanced at him. "Get out of my sight."

The door closed behind Theremir long before Kor stopped staring at it. He was too angry even to feel a moment's relief that Tavia had been cleared of suspicion. Finally, he turned and looked out the window. Sunlight was streaming in, and the day was exceptionally clear.

Kor walked over to lean on the window ledge. He could see out over his domain to the far gates and beyond. As he watched those below him go about their tasks, he wondered when, if ever, his life, and Tavia's, would be that calm.

* * *

Theremir Keorl stood before the locked door to Tavia's cell. He had considered simply having one of his guards release the prisoner, but knew that that would be the coward's approach. After all, what could Tavia say to him that the *Ormen* had not already said? He took a deep breath and opened the door.

Inside, Tavia wondered why she was being disturbed in the middle of the morning. She had already received her breakfast, and the tray had been removed an hour ago. The only remaining possibility frightened her. She shuddered as Theremir entered.

He looked at her and tried to keep his voice level. "You may go," he said quietly.

Tavia stared at him in amazement. "I can what?"

"You are free to go anywhere you like in the Rasethi Sarin."

Tavia stood up, hesitantly, trying to decide whether this was some kind of trap. "Why are you letting me go? What's happened?"

Theremir scowled. He really wasn't in the mood to give lengthy explanations. "You are no longer being held for questioning. We're---" Theremir paused, looking for an easy way out. "We're now convinced of your words."

Tavia laughed; no, she roared. She laughed until she realized that Theremir had neither moved nor said anything to try to stop her. He was standing, to one side of the door, very straight and solemn.

It suddenly occurred to Tavia that Theremir had failed in a way that all Intelligence agents have nightmares about--he'd been outwitted by another spy and had not only fallen for the trap, but into it as well. Tavia knew how Star Fleet dealt with such mistakes; she didn't want to think about Kor's reaction.

Tavia looked at Theremir and smiled sympathetically. "Sorry, Theremir. It happens to the best of us."

Tavia walked down the corridor. She glanced at Mike Laird's cell. The door was slightly ajar and the cell empty. A clean blanket had been folded and placed at the foot of the bed.

She spoke aloud to the empty room. "Good-bye, Mike," she said, gently.

Tavia's eyes filled again with tears as she tried to convince herself that they would have broken him eventually, even if he hadn't spoken her name. She, too, had been conditioned to give old, worthless information under questioning. Poor Mike had picked what he'd considered some of the 'safest' names to use. . .

Tavia shook her head ruefully and headed back up to the living quarters of the Rasethi Sarin.

* * *

"This is one of the braver things I've ever done," muttered Kor. He stood outside Tavia's door and knocked.

"Who is it?"

"Kor."

Tavia stared at the door. "Come in."

Kor came a little way into her room and then stood still, very stiff and tense. "*Sinish krassav*," he said formally.

"Hello," said Tavia. She looked at him, wondering what he was feeling beyond all his formality, but she couldn't know.

"Tell me something," she said. She spoke in System English--she couldn't bring herself to speak Agavoi yet. "Did anyone miss me? Did Kirdan wonder what happened to his *Ama*?"

"He missed you grievously," said Kor softly. He paused, then added, "So did I."

Tavia gazed at him for a moment, and changed the subject. "Theremir let me out of my cell. What did you do to him, Kor?"

Kor grimaced. "I haven't done anything yet," he said shortly.

Tavia smiled a little, reflectively. "Don't be too unkind to him." Kor gave her a startled look. She commented, "I think Theremir is something of a fool in his obsession for your security. But as for what he did to me---well, he did exactly what I would have done.

"Why don't you leave him alone?" she suggested. "It'll be punishment enough for him to face you, let alone me. I'd say that what he's feeling now, if he's got any conscience at all, is worse than any violence you could do to him." Tavia paused, and added, "In a few days or maybe weeks I'd like to talk to him, see if I can straighten things out.

"As for you. . ." Tavia paused, letting Kor stand there uncomfortably for a minute. "I guess I'll just have to remind myself more often that you are the *Ormen* Alkarin, and not just my Ari." She smiled at him.

Listening to her, Kor felt a great relief. He relaxed in his stance. "You astonish me, Katlena," he said. "I came here expecting a Challenge from you--your right, after what Theremir and I did to you."

"Challenge?" said Tavia, startled. She laughed in disbelief. "It never occurred to me," she said slowly. "I'm not that much of a killing. I certainly wouldn't ever think of Challenging you."

Kor looked both surprised and relieved. "Then I will apologize, and ask if there is anything I can do for you in any way. You have gained honor where Theremir and I have lost, and I wanted to show my admiration for that."

Tavia looked directly at him, touched by his words of courtesy and thoughtfulness. "Thank you, Kor."

"My privilege," he replied. He gazed at her. There was some emotion in his expression that he didn't seem to know how to put words to. "Sometimes I regret ever capturing you," he murmured. "I don't like putting you through all the pain, the conflicts and the tumult that I've caused."

"Don't be humble," said Tavia, a little shaken. "It sounds terrible, coming from you."

"Sorry," he said with a laugh. "But arrogant possessiveness and willing trust do not mix easily."

Tavia took two or three steps forward and reached out her hand. For a moment Kor just looked at it; then, he brought his fingers forth to meet hers.

"Trust--one of the hardest things to achieve," said Tavia. She swallowed hard and added slowly, because she felt compelled to, "I trust you, Kor. Completely. I give my life to you."

"And I to you," said Kor very quietly. Tavia looked at him in shocked wonder.

"What pain we had to give, to reach this point of trust," he said gently. Tavia nodded. They looked at each other, acknowledging that much would have to be resolved between them, but at least they had made a beginning.

Questions

Who is this stranger
at my side?
How is it I feel
such warmth within?
Why do I look upon
this man with pride?
What is it in him
that draws me in?

I look at him
and shake my head--
Is this the lord
I feared in my heart?
Is this the man
I welcome to my bed?
I wonder how
to tell them apart.

He is gentle and kind,
sharing and warm.
He is cruel and vengeful
and easy to ire.
And yet I know
he will keep me from harm--
In his heart I have stirred
a loving fire.

Who is this stranger
at my side?
How can I love
what I don't understand?
Why can't I accept
what he would provide?
What is it that wills me
to take his hand?



A Pride of Wolves

Karras *iyo* Taralkarin burst into his father's office. The *Ormen* Alkarin looked up, startled, at the unmannerly intrusion. His son was angry. Kor lifted his eyebrows at him and looked very faintly amused.

"Good morning, Karras," said Kor. "I expected you home some time today--but not quite in such a precipitous fashion."

Karras had the good grace to look slightly sheepish. He stood stiffly in front of his father's desk, his jaw set. "*Akra*, I want to talk to you."

"Sit down, Karras." Kor looked at him directly. "What are you so angry about?"

Karras grimaced. His father had a way of posing questions that was unnerving. "Before I took my leave, my commander gave me my new orders," he said.

"And?"

"And I want to know why I'm not being sent to fight in the war against the Federation!" exclaimed Karras. "I asked my commander where my orders came from, and he said they had come directly from you."

"Calm down, Karras," said Kor quietly. "You've been in the Military long enough by now to have learned courtesy, haven't you?"

Karras scowled, but tried to recover his dignity. He had been out of the Military academy for only three years, and was very conscious of his rank and duties.

"Your orders have me staying in the *Ormenel* pacifying our hostile allies the Arkishen," said Karras unhappily. "Why, *Akra*? Why can't I go fight in the war?"

"A number of reasons," answered Kor. "First, the war isn't going particularly well. We attack, the *Federen* retaliate---"

"That doesn't worry me!" interrupted Karras hotly. "I won't be protected or pampered."

"You? Pampered?" Kor looked incredulous. "I don't want a pet rabbit, I want a warrior. Have you thought about what your new orders entail? Dealing with the Arkishen my provoke a worse fight than the war out on the Border."

Karras looked strongly doubtful, and still truculent. "But why, *Akra*? Everyone's fighting the *Federen*. Why can't I?"

"You've studied *orashathnavi*, the codes of honor, since you were a small child. Did you learn nothing? You say you want to go to the Periphery to fight *Federen*. That may be for some--but not for you. No, I

will not permit it."

"You declared this war, *Akra*. Why won't you let your son fight in it?"

Kor stared at his son and measured his words before he spoke. "If nothing else, because the mother of my son Kirdan is a human."

Karras scrutinized his father, then spoke bitterly. "I like Kirdan, but sometimes I hate the thought of calling him brother."

Kor stared at Karras. Though enraged, he acknowledged, just barely, that his son expressed the same thoughts that many *kilingau* held. He controlled himself with an effort. "Do you ever listen to yourself speaking, Karras? You would be appalled at your own stupidity." He added with dangerous courtesy, "Would you care to go further?"

Karras eyed Kor like a young wolf wondering whether to challenge the leader of the wolf-pack. "*Akra*, we're at war with the Federation. How can you dare trust a human?"

"The more you talk, Karras," said Kor curtly, "the more you convince me that you're not ready to fight in this war. I won't have you running blindly to the Periphery to kill *Federen*. They're more than just some base rabble to be swept aside. They are a people, with a culture that has sustained them for as long as our own."

Karras looked stubborn. "Why do we fight them at all, if they are so noble?"

Kor strove to keep his temper. "Why does any killing Challenge another? Why did I Challenge Alargor, my predecessor, and lead a revolution in this *Ormenel*?" Kor's gaze was fierce and intent. "They are to be met and fought as individuals."

"Even as individuals, all we've ever heard about them---"

"Look at all they say about us!" broke in Kor. "If half of it were true, we would have died as a race long ago. You make a big mistake, Karras, in listening with your anger and pride instead of with your mind. You know nothing of humans, so you condemn them on the strength of hearsay."

He got up, and walked over to Karras. Now, he let some of his exasperation show in his face and voice. "You don't even know Tavia Nelson, and yet you come to me full of indignation. You accuse me of bringing an unfit child into my family, and imply that I'm guilty of extreme folly in caring for a human. Do you think so little of my judgment, Karras?"

"*Akra*, that isn't fair," protested Karras.

"Neither is what you've been saying," said Kor sternly. "Look at Katlena--Tavia--with an open heart, and judge her fairly, before you accuse her and all humans of depravity. I demand this, Karras. I will not accept the words of your prejudiced blindness."

There were several minutes of silence. Then Karras looked at his father and asked, "Is that why you won't let me go to war--ignorance?"

"Yes," answered Kor. "You will know and understand your enemy before you face him in battle."

Karras was quiet. His father's strong words had impressed him very much. He acknowledged wryly that his father was almost always right--when it came to judging people, that is.

'Am I that close-minded?' he wondered. Maybe he wasn't letting himself see that Tavia Nelson was a real person. It was easier to hate them all, all the *Federen*, for their strange ways and barbaric customs.

"I accept your challenge," he said. "And I'm sorry if I was disrespectful. But sometimes, being polite is very difficult."

"I've noticed that you find it so," agreed Kor dryly. "I accept your apology, Karras."

Karras rose from his chair. He seemed a little subdued, a bit pensive. "I'll be home for several weeks' leave before my new assignment," he said. "That'll give me time to catch up on everything that's happened."

Kor nodded, smiling a little, knowing that his son was trying to show that his apology was really sincere. He knew that Karras would try to be fair, and he was proud of him for that. "I'll see you at dinner tonight, my son," he said pleasantly. Karras made his leave-taking quick and went out.

Kor stared after his son for a long moment, then sighed and returned to his work.

* * *

Karras passed by Koshira's and Kirdan's rooms on his way through the Rasethi Sarin. Inside Kirdan's sun-room, he heard an indistinguishable remark, and, suddenly, a loud, angry voice, obviously Kirdan's.

"It's not fair!" complained Kirdan. "I wasn't being bad. *Akra* is mean!"

Karras approached the door. It was half-open, which meant that he could listen in without being considered rude.

He could see Tavia's back and head. She was kneeling by Kirdan, who was sitting in the middle of the floor, looking stubborn, mad, and immovable.

"*Akra* is right," said Tavia, her tone quite firm. "You were being rude then, and you're being rude now, Kirdan."

Kirdan stared up into his mother's face. It looked like he was considering whether to hate her, too, but he couldn't quite bring himself to that. He lowered his head and sulked.

Karras decided to go in. He pushed the door open wide, and stepped inside. "Hello, brat," he said to Kirdan. He nodded briefly to Tavia.

Kirdan looked up. Karras could now see the smudges of dirt and tears on his face. A half-grin appeared on Kirdan's face, and he leaped up, and ran to his brother. "Karras!"

Karras picked up the youngling, and held him balanced on his left arm. They grinned at each other, their faces on the same level.

Tavia looked with rueful affection at the two together and came forward. "Courteous greetings, Karras," she said quietly.

"Greetings," said Karras. Painfully aware of what his father had said, he tried to be polite. "Are things well with you?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Tavia. She was a little startled at his uncommon courtesy. "Welcome home."

"Thank you." Karras decided that he'd done enough for the moment. He glanced at Kirdan, who was still looking defiantly angry. "You've been crying, brat," said Karras, good-naturedly. "What's wrong?"

Kirdan put his arms around Karras' neck and leaned his head on his big brother's shoulder. "Nobody likes me," he said, his voice muffled.

Karras made a comforting noise. "If that's true, why would we put up with you?" he asked. Kirdan raised his head to stare at Karras. His young face looked puzzled.

"Kirdan, come to me," said Tavia. Karras put down the youngling, who obediently came over to his mother. She sat down on the rug.

She said seriously and gently, "Kirdan, we were talking about what you did. *Akra* punished you because you did wrong. That's what's important." Kirdan's face was full of skepticism.

She said, for Karras' benefit as much for Kirdan's, "You went into your father's office without asking permission, Kirdan. That's wrong."

Behind her, Karras winced. He had also rushed in to see his father without stopping. He was very glad his father hadn't called him out on it.

"You were also rude to one of the *Ormen's* visitors," said Tavia chidingly. "Next time, remember to be polite!"

Kirdan was looking at her very solemnly. He may not have understood all her words, but he seemed to be impressed by her obvious concern for him. He reached one hand back and rubbed his backside. "Why didn't *Akra* say anything?" he asked plaintively. "He just hit!"

"I would have, too," Tavia declared. She smiled at her young son. "That's what you'll remember best. The hurt will go away, but your memory of the blow won't."

Kirdan decided abruptly that they'd spent enough time talking. He shifted a little, from foot to foot. "I'm hungry," he announced.

Tavia laughed. "It won't be long until dinner," she said. The youngling looked hopeful. "It's *amiu* tonight," she said, naming a particularly delectable kind of meat and grain stew. Kirdan grinned, pleased, and suddenly threw his arms around his mother. She held him very close for a long minute.

Karras watched them with newfound respect, thinking about what he'd just seen. Tavia was being considerate and patient with young Kirdan. She had let him know what was wrong in a way that was all at once firm,

gentle, and completely fair.

Listening to her made him think back on his talk with Kor. His father could have ignored Karras' excited words, or gotten angry enough to discipline his son. Instead, Kor had rather tolerantly listened to his son accuse him of various indiscreet misdeeds.

'She shows wisdom and understanding,' thought Karras, looking at Tavia. 'And I didn't. *Akra* is right--sometimes I talk before I think.'

He glanced back down to see Tavia looking at him curiously. He gave her a half-hearted smile. "You're right about remembering punishments," he said conversationally. "I did some pretty foolish things--and was strongly disciplined for some of them."

Tavia gently extricated herself from Kirdan's hug and got up from the floor. Kirdan tugged on the bottom of her long tunic insistently, and she smilingly picked him up and held him.

Tavia looked at Karras, and remembered to ask why he'd come. "Karras, I was so intent on dealing with the little one here, that I didn't get a chance to ask if you'd wanted to see me for something." As she was talking, some of her long hair fell in front of her shoulders. Kirdan happily grabbed a handful of it, and began playing with it. Tavia grimaced in wry amusement.

"No," said Karras. "I--just stopped at the door, that's all. I wanted to see Kirdan." He looked uncomfortable.

Tavia, guessing at the reason for Karras' awkwardness, smiled slightly. "You've done your duty, by saying hello to me," she said. "If you want, I'll leave, and you can stay and talk to Kirdan."

"That isn't it at all," protested Karras, startled by her forward comment. For a moment, he was thoroughly confused. "I mean, I---" he stopped, not knowing how to begin facing the problem. "Oh, no matter," he said lamely, avoiding her stare.

Tavia willingly dropped the subject. She lowered Kirdan to the floor again. "You're getting heavy, little one," she remarked. She glanced at Karras. "You can bring Kirdan down to dinner," she said.

Karras nodded, glad to have a reprieve. "I'll see you there," he said, as Tavia disappeared out the door.

* * *

Several nights later, in bed, Kor and Tavia turned to each other, not for shared pleasure but for talk. It was a night when both were very awake and full of questions. They talked about Karras for a while, Kor relating Karras' conflicts over the war and humans, Tavia trying to objectively point out where those conflicts came from and how they might be resolved.

"If only there was some way to bring us together better, as a family," Tavia said. "Sometimes, Kor, I think you kilingau emphasize the individual too much. There's no family feeling."

"I am an infrequent father," admitted Kor. "And, my family is small,

and very new. This domain is only eight years old."

Tavia smiled reflectively. "I have gotten the impression that other killingaven domains are hundreds of years old and just overrun with children and cousins and half-relations. . . several thousands of people in each household."

"That's quite true," said Kor. "My domain of birth, *krasaia* Kothir, was very large. I remember a year of schooling, where the entire class was filled with my cousins and cousins' children." He grinned. "It was good, to be able to fight with one another, play with one another and learn together."

"That's what this small family lacks," said Tavia. "Unity."

Kor looked at her, and nodded slowly. "I and my family are set apart, because I hold the *Ormen*'s status. However, I don't want to be remembered only for myself, but also for what I give to the domain."

Tavia smiled, pleased to hear his strong, proud words. There was the killing's real loyalty--to his children and the future. As much as Kor took just pride in the honor given him, he would take still greater pride in raising his children to high honor and stature.

"We are so few, and yet it seems so hard to keep us together," Kor said thoughtfully. "We need to remember more often that we are a family."

"A rather unusual one, at that," Tavia added ironically.

Kor nodded in agreement. "Let's see--there's one strong, rash son, who, unfortunately, is just like his father was many years ago."

"You must've been something when you were twenty or so years old," said Tavia, looking at him speculatively.

Kor met that look with a wry grin. "I was insufferable," he commented. "Then there's Koshira, who is like a symbol of my success and rebirth. She was born in the revolution; she was the first newborn in the domain of the *Ormen* Alkarin."

"Then Kirdan," remarked Tavia. "And me. We don't fit very well."

"Both of you are very special to me," said Kor, gazing at her with deep affection. "You--well, you are a killing. And Kirdan is a normal youngling of mine--obnoxious and precocious."

He looked up suddenly, struck by an idea. "I think that I should declare a family feast," he said. "It will soon be harvest time--a time of festivals, of sharing new wealth. I think we should celebrate the family."

Tavia looked at him inquiringly, hopefully. Kor touched her on the forehead lightly.

"A feast," he said happily. "We'll take over the kitchen and make a feast. I will go hunting for meat. Everyone can help prepare and cook food---"

Tvia caught his trend of thought and added, "I'll make something peculiarly native to my home planet, of course---"

"Of course," agreed Kor dryly. "And since dessert is what he's most interested in, Kirdan may make that--with your help, since I don't want fruit drink on my meat."

Tavia laughed merrily at that, since just the other day they'd both witnessed Kirdan pouring his fruit juice over his dinner to 'make it taste good.'

"I'll keep him out of trouble," Tavia promised with a straight face. "By the way, how do we keep Karras from eating all the food before we serve it?"

Kor laughed. "We'll manage somehow. He can prepare the vegetables; he won't want to eat all of those. Koshira may cook the grain dishes."

"I guess you could call this a family picnic," said Tavia brightly. "After all, nothing brings people together faster than food."

They smiled at each other. Tavia reached for him first. They held each other tightly, savoring their unique relationship. Their hold relaxed a little, but not much, as they both drifted into sleep.

* * *

They gathered for their private family dinner. Kor sat at the head of the table, looking resplendent in a gold-trimmed burgundy tunic. He appeared amused and proud as he surveyed the four people dearest to him.

Karras, as oldest son, sat on Kor's right. He was the only one, apart from Tavia, who didn't have Kor's intense black hair and eyes. He seemed to be staring covertly at Tavia, who was sitting directly opposite him. She, a small grin on her face, was gazing at Kor in admiring speculation.

Koshira, Kor's only acknowledged daughter, was next to Karras. Just eleven years old, she looked very much too small for her chair. Pleased and excited, she was bouncing up and down in the chair, barely remembering her manners.

Kirdan, only five years old, sat next to his mother in a higher chair than the others, so that he could reach the food. At that particular moment he had his hand in a bowl full of raw vegetables and was trying to steal one. He caught a forbidding glance from his father and hastily snatched his hand back.

The meal began. Tavia's motley-looking small 'pizzas' went over well. When they were first served, everyone, including Kor, had stared at them dubiously, not wanting to make a move. Kirdan, the hungry one, solved the problem by grabbing one and trying to swallow it whole.

Tavia had to laugh at the sight of Karras skeptically dissecting the small appetizer, sampling the meat, the sharp tomato-like vegetable, and the other ingredients, and then eating each separately. Tavia herself didn't think it tasted much like pizza, but it was good. She smiled wryly as she slowly ate hers.

The fare became more traditional after that. Many deep gold-brown and black shallow bowls were placed on the table. Everyone had outdone themselves. There were bowls full of fragrantly seasoned meat and grains

in broth; toasted nuts with butter and salt; raw red vegetables tasting cool and tangy. Two different wines, a yellow and a purple wine, were served.

Kor was in a particularly jubilant mood as he surveyed his small family and the feast set before them. His offering to the occasion had been a *keor*, an animal like a wild boar, that he had prepared in three different forms. He, having a special fondness for ribs, reached for one and began to gnaw on it.

The meat was superb. Tavia complimented Kor on it several times, and praised his skill as a hunter and a cook. He thanked her, amusement and approval in his expression, a warm gleam in his eyes.

"I thought the Military had good food, but this is fantastic," remarked Karras with his mouth full. He grinned at his father. "Maybe I'll come home more often. Thank you, *Akra*."

"My pleasure," said Kor with a brief grin. "It's good to have you as part of the family again. Tell me, Karras, how are you enjoying the Military?"

"Oh, I'm enjoying it thoroughly," said Karras cheerfully. "So are my superiors. They look at me, and wonder why I'm not as brilliant as my father. It's very hard living up to you, *Akra*."

There was a certain amount of pride in Kor's smile. "Sorry," he murmured.

Karras continued to gaze at his father, looking vaguely uncomfortable. "*Akra*. . . I should say this now, because I appreciate this dinner, and what you're trying to do." Kor looked slightly perplexed.

"I'll obey your orders, *Akra*, and go deal with the Arkishen," said Karras, somewhat reluctantly. "I'd rather be out on the Periphery, but I accept your reasons for not wanting me to go."

Kor looked both astonished and pleased. "Thank you, Karras." He smiled at his son, a little wryly.

Karras glanced around the table, his gaze resting on his little brother Kirdan, who was manfully laboring with his knife and fingers on a large piece of *keor*. Koshira had chosen her father's way out and had abandoned her knife for a good grip on a bone.

Karras looked sidelong at his father, and then at Tavia. She, catching his gaze, smiled at him. "I have to say, also, that I was wrong about you," he said to her, putting his words forth with simple directness. "I thought you were just another Earther."

Kor coughed as a mouthful of wine tried to go the wrong way. He put his knife down and stared at Karras.

Tavia looked at Karras. Slowly her frown changed to a look of wry amusement. "That's all right," she said. "I thought you were just a nasty Klingon, too." Kor hid his eyes behind his hand and laughed silently and mirthfully.

Instead of irritating Karras, her remark only seemed to please him more. "That's just what I like about you," he said excitedly. "No soft human would ever dare say a thing like that! You're just as strong as any of us."

Tavia laughed whole-heartedly, enjoying herself immensely. "I'm just a person, Karras. Not particularly a human, or a killing--just an individual, with my own thoughts and desires."

"That's what I realized," said Karras, looking very intent. "I decided that I like you after all. You're real, and I know that you mean what you say, and that you can be trusted. You may not be my *Ama*, but you are a very nice person."

"Thank you very much," said Tavia, laughing a little but feeling very moved. "I'll confess that I like you too, Karras."

Kor, who had been watching this exchange with great delight and pride, now solemnly raised his glass of wine. "*Su kethes*," he said grandly, praising life. "And to this family---Katlena, Karras, Koshira, Kir---"

He stopped in mid-sentence as he realized that the two younglings at the far end of the table were not paying any attention. Even as he paused in his toast, Koshira threw a nut in the general direction of Kir-dan. He opened his mouth, trying to catch and eat it, but the nut fell short--landing in his dish. Kirdan immediately picked it up and popped it into his mouth.

"Koshira," said Kor sternly, "would you mind telling me what you're doing."

She turned a wide-eyed, startled face toward him. "Throwing nuts at Kirdan, *Akra*."

"And I caught two of them," Kirdan added helpfully. "Like this." He tossed a nut up into the air a little way, and managed to maneuver his mouth so that the nut fell between his teeth. He munched happily. "See?"

"Yes," said Kor, and sighed tiredly. Tavia made a small noise which sounded like a chortle. Kor glared at her fiercely, and she tried to hide her merriment.

"Koshira---"

"Yes, *Akra*?"

Kor frowned at her. "Stop throwing food."

She sank a little in her chair. "Yes, *Akra*," she said meekly. "I'm sorry."

"I was trying to create a toast to this family," said Kor with wounded dignity, glaring at the members of his dinner feast. "But now I'm not sure whether I should. The lot of you are degenerate, disreputable, disgraceful---"

"Not to mention shameless," agreed Tavia, with a wicked look.

"And aggravating," said Karras cheerfully.

Kor looked outraged. "Let's also add insolent to the list," he declared in pretended wrath.

"Here's to infamy," said Tavia, raising her wine glass high and then downing the contents in a gulp.

Kor reached over and refilled her wine glass. He looked around the table to make sure everyone had their attention focused on him. They all did, even Kirdan and Koshira.

He lifted his glass and nodded courteously to each of his family. "I praise all of you," he said. "For being strong and proud, and intelligent and independent." He drank from his glass. "In spite of war, in spite of turmoil, let us delight in our sharing."

"To ourselves," announced Karras. He drank deeply of his wine. Over the top of his glass he noticed everyone else doing the same.

Maybe it was just the good food, or the light wine, but those at the table felt joined by a strong surge of harmony and well-being. They smiled at each other, not needing words to express their content.

Tavia glanced at each member of the family--her family--and found herself appreciating the small, subtle differences of these kilingau. She thought about all the reasons they were so dear to her, and felt very glad to be a part of this.

The two younglings were getting sleepy very quickly. Kor had allowed them both to have a little bit of wine, watered down of course, and it was having its predictable effect. Koshira and Kirdan were both yawning and rubbing their eyes.

Kor laughed, pointing to them. "Look," he said to Tavia. "Don't you wish putting them to sleep was always so easy?" Tavia nodded fervently.

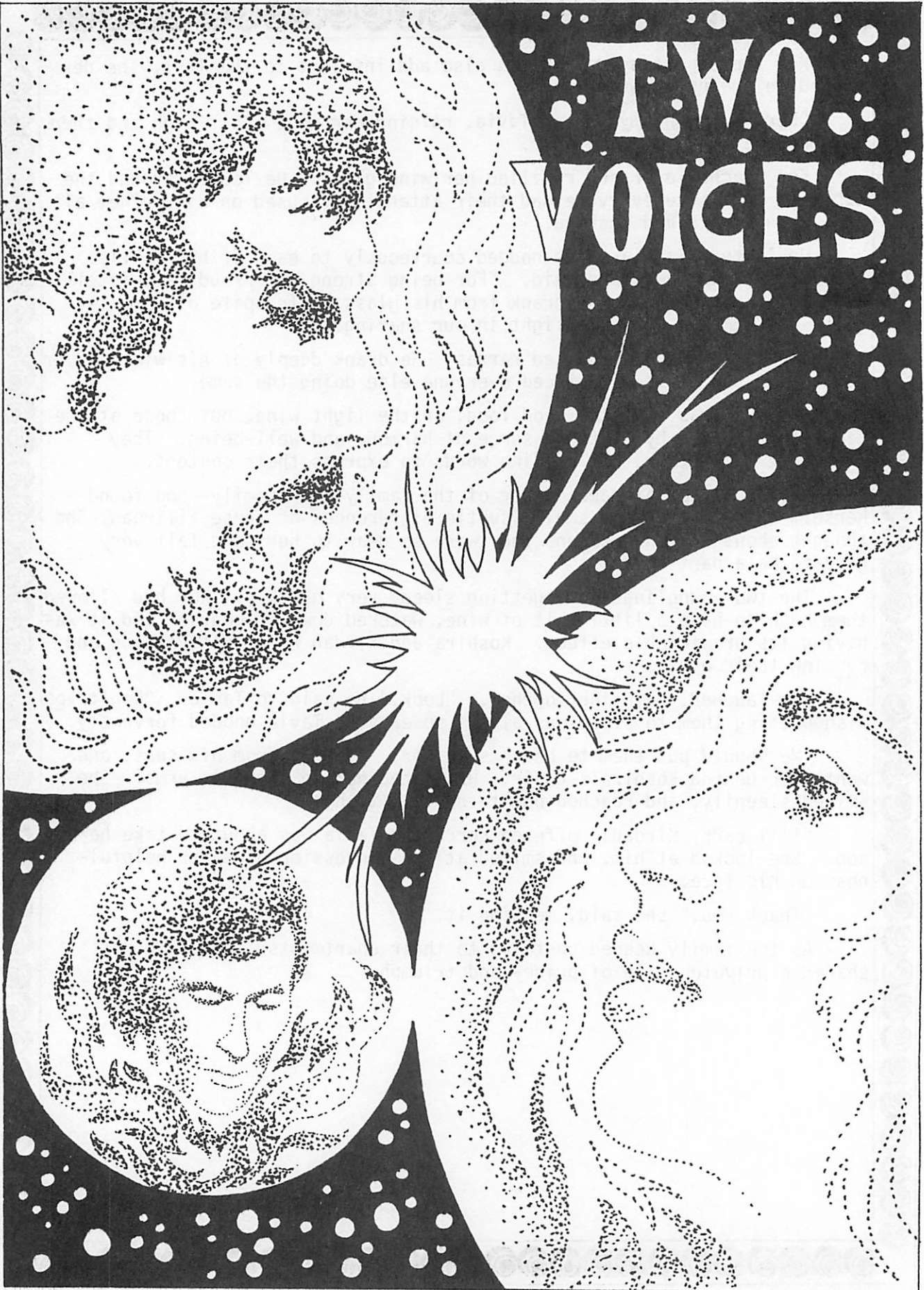
"We should put them to bed," said Kor. He rose from his seat, and went over behind Koshira's chair. He lifted her up into his arms. She smiled sleepily, and reached out to hold on to him.

"I'll carry Kirdan," offered Karras as Tavia was about to take her son. She looked at him, and smiled at the expression of eager helpfulness on his face.

"Thank you," she said, meaning it.

As the family headed upstairs to their apartments, Tavia and Kor shared a private smile of pride--and triumph.

TWO VOICES



Two Voices

The Court of the Sun was bathed in light. The reds and golds of the rocks in the garden glowed as if having a life of their own. The strikingly shaped silver-bark trees cast strong black shadows in the Court.

The rock and tree garden lay at the level of the rooftops of the Rasethi Sarin. A shaded colonnade ran around the Court. Along this arched promenade walked Kor Alkarin.

But even in this secret, hidden place, in this garden of harmony and beauty, Kor could find no rest. He rubbed his eyes in weariness, feeling discomfort, and a strange weakness.

His thoughts had been wandering. He had roved in his mind from battle to battle, reviewing the recent events on the Border, going over the conflicts, the strategies, the men and women who had led the struggle, fought and died. 'Oh, so many deaths,' he thought. 'So many unnecessary deaths. No Challenges, no honor in this war.'

No Challenges. Huge armies met and attacked with rival forces of annihilation; a single warrior had no chance to step forth and call out his chosen enemy to close combat. Individual fighters meant nothing, to the forces of the Federation. They made their tallies of victory and loss by numbers killed and wounded, by numbers of bombs, missiles and ships used in battle.

Kor drew in a deep breath, and let it out softly in an angry moan. There were no Challenges to be faced. The war went badly. It had gone on now for six years. Everything he did seemed to go awry.

'So many have suffered because of the war,' he thought wearily. 'My friends, who followed me through revolution and went off to this war to fight for me, have died.'

He stopped briefly in his slow pacing and looked out into the bright courtyard. 'My plans for war fail, my friends and family suffer, my personal conflicts worsen---'

His flow of thought broke suddenly, and he tensed. A memory had risen in his mind, a strong image of pain that burned. He confronted it. "I declared individual Challenge to my human brother Kirin/Roan Morgan," he murmured aloud. "I also declared Challenge-war with the Federation. But I can't win either."

Abruptly Kor turned and moved on. He walked, lost in his reverie, and did not notice the newcomer in the Court of the Sun.

Tavia, who'd come to the garden to relax in the sunlight, noticed Kor immediately. She went toward him, but slowly, as she recognized his mood.

Kor glanced up at the sound of her approach. His face showed very little expression. "*Sinish*," he said perfunctorily.

"*Sinish krassav*," she responded. She noticed the small traces of worry and sorrow in his features and frowned slightly. "Do you wish privacy, or would you welcome company?" she asked cautiously.

Kor looked at her, really becoming aware of her presence for the first time. "I appreciate your consideration," he said slowly. "Walk with me, if you would."

Tavia realized that something must be very wrong; rarely was he so formally polite. She felt concern. What he said and felt was very important to her now.

"Ari," she said, using her private name for him, "may I ask what's wrong?"

Kor stopped and stared at her long and hard. He seemed genuinely appreciative of her company, but wasn't quite sure how to deal with her. He observed, "I was reflecting on the war," he said. In answer to her inquiring look, he added, "Which goes badly, Katlena--for both sides."

Tavia looked down and didn't say anything. Her emotions were too strong, and too conflicting, for her to speak of them rationally.

Kor looked glad to be able to share some of his troubles. "I must also add, in honesty to you," he said slowly, "that I had thoughts of Kirin."

Tavia's eyes went to his. She tried to repress her surprise. For so long that name had been a forbidden utterance, a topic not to be discussed. "Thank you for your candor," she replied, and looked at him hopefully.

Kor smiled a little at her expression. "You are so much wiser than when you first came here. I don't mind sharing my thoughts with you, now that you can understand me." He paused. Tavia waited patiently.

Kor continued. "I also think that you have the right to know my feelings about Kirin. You and he were very close. . . much closer than your military positions required. You know him best, now; even better than I."

Tavia nodded, afraid to break his concentration with her words. His mood was a very changeable thing; she was not about to destroy this moment of intimacy.

Kor stared at her, his tension growing. He wanted to tell her, but it was very difficult to form the words. "Captain Morgan is well. Though he found Salao to be. . . inhospitable, he met the challenge of that planet of Chaos. He defies his captors."

Tavia cheered silently for Roan. "Good," she said simply. Impulsively, she went on, "Tell me of the years you knew your little brother Kirin. Please."

Kor, startled, stared at her. After a moment he nodded. He looked thoughtfully at Tavia. "Before I begin, I must ask: how do you see Kirin? As a human or a killing?"

"I think he's both," she answered promptly. "Of course, I know his human side best."

Kor frowned at the words 'his human side.' As he went on, his voice bore an even mixture of pain and dismay. "Our years as brothers were long ago. I begin to doubt whether I know him at all, when I think of the bonds that are broken. We swore oaths of fealty, but treachery and evil fortune made us break them. . ." Kor stared unseeing out into the courtyard. He made a small sound, something like a sigh and a moan, and then stirred restlessly. "My brother Kirin," he said thoughtfully. "I could tell you a thousand tales, each one of them like a step in a dance, or a note in a song. Little brother

Kirin." Tavia sat down quietly as Kor stared out into the Court of the Sun.

"I first met Kirin when I came home on leave one spring. His appearance was a mystery to me. I knew he wasn't any get of Kesan's; my father was by then too old to sire anything on anybody. Kesan explained that he'd agreed to raise Kirin in payment of a strong life-obligation to Kirin's natural father.

"I saw the sense of that, but I didn't understand why my father showed Kirin the honor of making him Second-Son of Domain Kothir. I didn't understand that action until many years later. . .

"I liked Kirin from the first--he was very intelligent, very bold and self-assured in a way that was highly amusing to see in a youngling of ten years. I came to respect him. After less than a year of training, he was ahead of many his age in our *krasaia*. He was extremely quick."

Kor looked toward Tavia. He suddenly appeared to her as a far younger man, one with hopes and joy in his face, a man without all the scars that Kor Alkarin bore. Tavia smiled as Kor went on.

"Kirin followed me, and look up to me. The attention was very flattering. I was pleased. I spent many hours teaching him, for he was curious about everything, and very eager to learn. Those days were so good. We shared everything, Kirin and I. It was like suddenly getting a new son." Kor half closed his eyes, struck by some remembered pain.

Tavia moved to put her hand over Kor's in comfort, but Kor pulled away. Tavia watched as he fought with himself. She realized that she had to let Kor tell his story uninterrupted. As much as she wanted to react or comment, she also desperately wanted to hear it all. And so she sat in silence with him, until he was again ready to speak.

He straightened slightly, having summoned new strength with which to go on.

"At first my father was pleased with Kirin's progress. He was less pleased when Kirin preferred my teachings to his own. Kirin began to assert himself. So my father tried, in various ways, to break the bond between Kirin and me.

"What my father didn't realize is that, in fact, he achieved the reverse of his purpose. Common hatred of Kesan was one of the reasons we stayed so close to one another, Kirin and I. We learned to rely on each other. Later, this reliance and trust led to our shared esteem and love."

Kor paused again. Tavia considered what it had cost him to say this much. She had watched the emotions change on his face--a bewildering mixture of grief and hatred, love, frustration and sorrow.

"You are the first person to whom I've ever spoken of this," Kor said quietly to her. "I don't know that I shall speak of this ever again. It brings too much pain."

Tavia sat, stunned by his honesty, and feeling overwhelmed by the Kor she was being allowed to see.

Kor went on. "Kirin was with me for nine years--a unique nine years in my experience. My memories of that time are very vivid, and no one can ever take them away. But neither Kirin nor I had any conception that the end of those nine years would bring an end to our pattern of living.

"At that time, our father Kesan told him the purpose for which he had

been trained for nine years in Domain Kothir. He was intended to work as a spy in the Federation.

"Kirin and I said farewell. The parting was bitter. I didn't like the mission he was begin sent on; neither did he, though he tried to hide his anger. We swore our love and allegiance to each other, and separated with promises to meet again in the future." Kor smiled ironically at his own words.

"After my little brother had left, Kesan told me the truth about Kirin--his human past and his home planet in the Federation. Kesan thought to shock and dishearten me. . ." Kor stopped. His voice had become harsh and forbidding; his expression showed his anger. "For all I despised my father, I had never believed him--or anyone else--capable of such a thing."

"At that time, I gave no attention to Kirin's human identity. His blood didn't matter at all--he was my brother, whether killing or. . . or spawn of Chaos. What could it matter? How could our differing ancestries possibly alter our shared love and loyalty?"

Kor looked down at his hands. "At least that is how I felt. It never occurred to me then that Kirin would betray me." Kor didn't hide the bitterness in his voice.

When he had finished, Tavia, too, looked away. Then she looked up at him and smiled quietly, almost sadly, with an awareness of both Kor and herself that she did not have before. The story had touched her to the heart. "I understand many things now that I never did," she said slowly, her voice low. "My--my sincere thanks. I don't really know how to say how much I appreciate your telling me that story."

"If you understood, then that is thanks enough," said Kor, in a more normal tone.

Tavia sat unmoving in the hot sun and watched him. When she was sure that Kor was again in a reasonably pleasant frame of mind, she began to speak with measured words. "You must understand how Roan feels, also. My story with Roan takes up where yours leaves off. Roan and I have known each other since we were both in Star Fleet Academy. I'm not going to delve into our relationship, but let it be enough to say that we grew very close.

"I think it was--well, it must be nine years by now. Nine years ago, we learned that Roan was a spy working for the *Ormenel*." Tavia paused as Kor gave out a growl of frustration.

"I was part of the Star Fleet Intelligence team that interrogated him," she went on. Kor turned to stare at her, his expression incredulous. "I saw all the layers of his mind as we probed his thoughts and memories. I realized that Roan was walking a dangerous path between the opposing parts of himself. He began as Roan Morgan, human. When only a boy, he was mind-broken and re-trained to be Kirin Kothir. . . your brother. No kinship exists between those two--Roan and Kirin, human and killing. They will never truly understand one another.

"When he was sent back to the Federation, Roan was a killing miserably trying to be a human, and hating it. He wished he was still just plain Kirin Kothir. He was, and still is, a very weary and frustrated man."

"I hadn't really looked at him in that way before," said Kor musingly, frowning. "It's hard for me to see him as two different persons. You say

then that the Captain Morgan I sent to Salao has little or no relation to Kirin Kothir."

"I think Roan Morgan wishes he had never heard of Kirin Kothir," said Tavia frankly. "Kirin Kothir is still a part of him--the part that makes Roan Morgan do unusual things, for the human he is. Kirin makes him want things he shouldn't want and hate things he should accept willingly. But Kirin is also a strong-willed individual who would be glad to help Roan make decisions quickly and act without self-doubt. But, because of the problems Kirin causes him, Roan Morgan won't let that part of himself 'take over.' He can't. Kirin, while very much a part of Roan, is, even more, a killing.

"How Roan feels now, after several years on Salao. . . I don't know," Tavia went on. "Almost certainly he is bitter. One thing I am certain of: underneath whatever bitterness or hatred that exists, there is a very strong love, untouched. Kor, you and Kirin are too much alike. Willful, proud, aggressive, and loyal. The only thing that is really keeping you apart is stubbornness--and misunderstanding. You both believe in the same kind of honor; only circumstances out of your control led that honor in different directions." Tavia stopped there, realizing that Kor wanted to interrupt. She had barely taken a breath when he began.

"You speak of honor; you welcome it as a concept. Some of you practice it and swear by it. But for me. . . well, if I don't find honor, it's as if I go without water; if I discover dishonor, it's as if I drink from a poisoned well.

"While I was at war with my *Ormenel*, fighting and then winning the *Ormen*'s place, Kirin's thoughts turned to treason in the Federation. If only he had never left---" the cry was torn from his throat. Kor looked at Tavia without seeing and Tavia knew that, once again, he was reliving those days that had gone before.

"There is the terrible knowledge within me that I might have prevented it, had I just been able to end the war a few months sooner. . . one of the first things I would have done as *Ormen* would have been to bring Kirin back." Kor's eyes were full of pain as he looked at Tavia.

She met his gaze. "What would you have said to him then, knowing what you did about him?" Tavia asked a question that Kor had asked himself many, many times.

"I don't know," he answered, his voice a mere whisper. "I don't know."

"You could not have failed to tell him the truth about himself, but what then?" Tavia watched Kor, hoping for a response. It did not come.

She went on, forcefully. "Consider your own past. You came to realize that your *Ormenel*, which you loved and served with all devotion, was turning to dishonor. The *Ormen* himself made a mockery of the patterns of honor. You found yourself suddenly at odds with everything you had been trained to support--so you rebelled."

Kor was listening to Tavia intently, alternately fascinated by her words and wondering what she was leading up to.

"Now consider Kirin. He suddenly discovered that his *Ormenel*, which he, too, loved and served willingly, had committed an act of unprecedented dishonor against him. His own 'father' had conceived the evil, and all the

Ormene appeared to have helped perpetrate the crime. So he--like you--rebelled."

Kor stared at her, eyes narrowed, expression grim. He could not bring himself to be angry with her, but slowly his indignation was rising. "How dare you suggest that he and I are the same?" he asked. "He didn't rebel, he gave in! He surrendered to weakness and guilt. I see neither strength nor honor in him!"

"You just can't stand the thought of his rejecting you," said Tavia heatedly. "In starting over, and making a place for himself, Roan's shown himself to be stronger than most people I know. You have no idea what he's gone through."

"He betrayed me," said Kor flatly and vehemently.

She glared at him. "Proud, arrogant, and stubborn, that's what you are," she remarked. "Before we start to bicker, I'd better leave and let you think about this whole thing." She nodded politely to him, and walked away.

Kor stared after her, frustrated. "How like a human, to walk off before a fight can begin," he muttered.

* * *

Late that same evening, Tavia received a summons--for her to join the *Ormen* in his office. Surprised and curious, she went.

Tavia rarely visited Kor in his office, for there she saw not the man but the ruler. It was hard to retain her knowledge of him as an individual, when being so painfully conscious of his status as Emperor.

Kor gave her a wry smile as she entered. He was sitting behind his desk, surrounded by papers. He looked very much in command, once again self-assured in his power, than he had been earlier.

Kor gestured at a chair; Tavia sat. "To what do I owe this invitation?" she inquired.

"Our talk together," answered Kor. Tavia looked at him.

Kor gazed at her, his expression intent and grave. "I've thought about all you said, and I acknowledge and respect the truth."

Tavia's face showed her astonishment and wonder. She leaned forward. Kor smiled faintly.

"I realized today that I was wrong in my judgment of. . ." he hesitated--"Roan." For a moment, he looked somewhat vulnerable.

"It's never been easy for me to admit to weakness," he said thoughtfully. "Particularly when, in this case, both Kirin and I are at fault." Kor smiled slightly, sadly. "Roan, Kirin--I don't know what to call him."

Kor continued, slowly. "Arrogance, pride and obstinacy are traits I have in abundance, and so does Kirin. We can't show the loyalty or the shared respect we once held for each other." Kor sighed. "To you, I can say that I feel compassion for Kirin; but, to Kirin, all that I could ever say would be words of bitter anger."

Tavia was struck by the depth of feeling in his face and voice. It hurt her, to see him in so much pain.

"Couldn't you send for him, try to talk to him?" she asked anxiously.

"I will not face him," said Kor adamantly. "We are in Challenge. That still stands."

Tavia grimaced. Kor noticed her expression, and interpreted it correctly. "You think our fight stupid, and useless. You find some of our ways overly cruel and violent, don't you? I tell you now, though you may not understand it, that this conflict of ours is over many wrongs--but the greatest harm comes from misunderstanding, selfishness and blind pride from both of us." He paused, frowning. He went on very slowly and speculatively. "The only possible end to this Challenge would be death--or understanding. Such wisdom and growth come only with time."

Tavia felt a great surge of hope as she looked at his face, and heard his strong, honest words. "You mean that you won't kill him?" she said eagerly.

"A Challenge is a matter of honor, not necessarily of violence," said Kor thoughtfully and a little wryly, as if it had taken him many years to learn that. "Personally, I never want to see Kirin again. I could not stand to look at him. But no, I wouldn't kill him--there is no resolution in that."

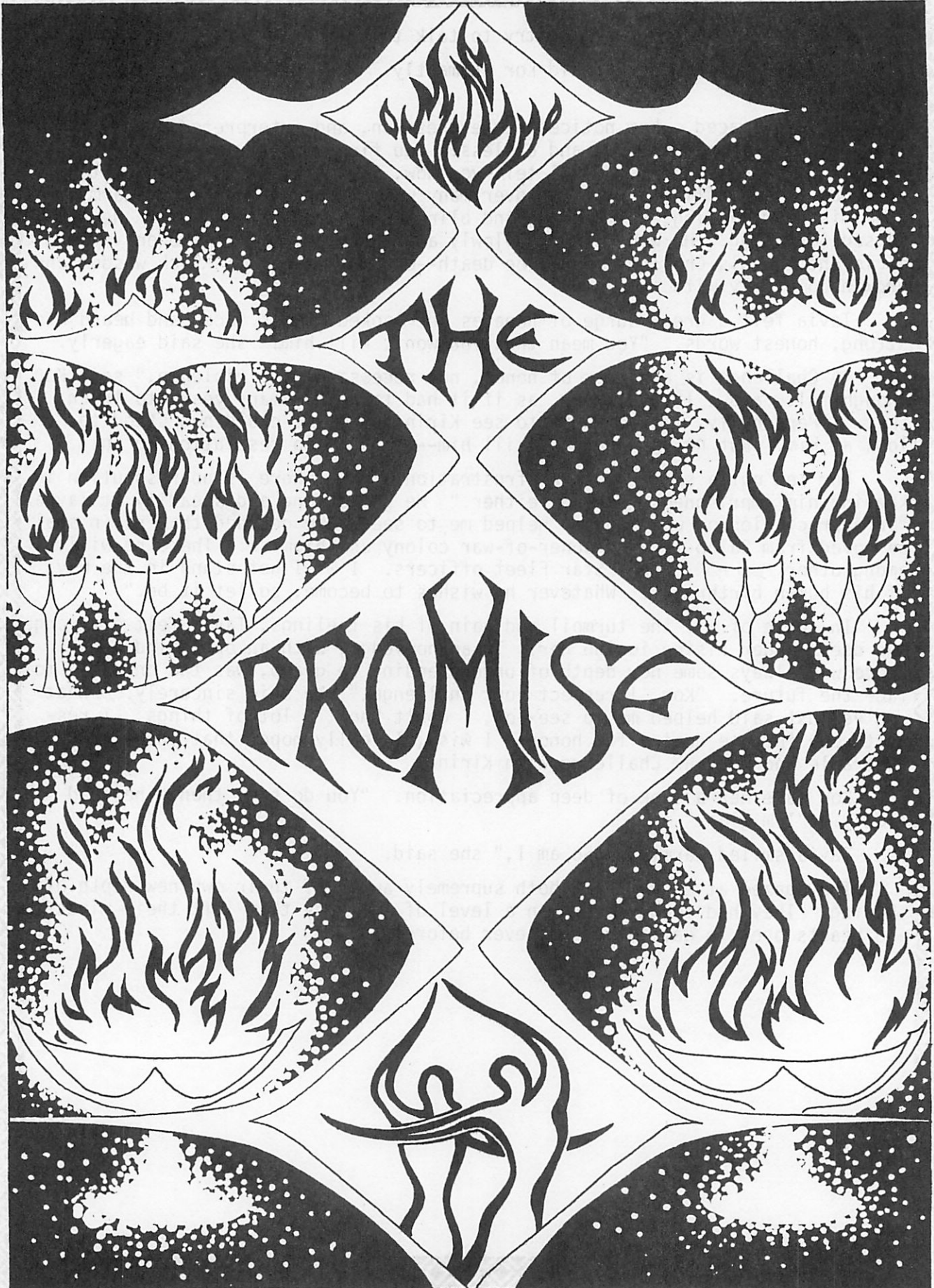
Kor let out a small sound of frustration. "But there is no resolution in keeping him imprisoned on Salao, either." He gazed long and steadily at Tavia. "In appreciation of what you've helped me to see, I've decided that Kirin shall be moved from Salao to a prisoner-of-war colony on Shiemisk. There he will be among other *Federen*, other Star Fleet officers. I will not stand in the way of his human birthright. Whatever he wishes to become, so let it be."

In spite of all the turmoil and pain of his feelings, Tavia felt a strange and deep wonder rising inside her. To acknowledge, with an open mind, that there was always some new depth of understanding to grasp, was the only way to face the future. "Kor, I respect your Challenge," she said sincerely. "What you've just said helped me to see--oh, I don't know, a lot of things. I respect your intense desire for honor. I wish, I really hope, that there is an honorable end to your Challenge with Kirin."

Kor gave her a look of deep appreciation. "You do see, then," he said slowly. "I'm glad."

Tavia smiled warmly. "So am I," she said.

They gazed at each other, both supremely aware of their own new depth of sharing. They had found accord on a level of intimacy that left their minds and hearts open to each other as never before.





The Promise

"Bind her with silken chains,
so that she may not escape."

The words, a fragment of a traditional sharing poem, came unbidden to Kor's lips. He smiled to himself, a faint wry smile with a touch of self-mockery in it. Kor was feeling relaxed and amused.

He thought of Tavia, the stranger, his prey, whom he had taken and held captive--in invisible bonds. He thought about the long months they had fought and misunderstood each other, and the brief moments of enlightenment that had somehow grown for them into years of intimacy.

She had become so important to him--so unique, yet so familiar. Her thoughts were as comfortable and well-loved as the close-shared dreams of a twin sister. And yet, even as they had learned so much about each other, there was still so much left to learn.

Kor realized that he suddenly felt lonely. The warmth of his thoughts, matched by the warmth of the evening air, was something to be shared.

He sought out Tavia. She was alone in his suite of rooms, sprawled on the bed, totally enrapt in a vividly illustrated book of tales for children. He came in, quiet and graceful as a wolf, and stood over her.

Tavia started, then relaxed as she saw Kor. "You like sneaking up on me, don't you?" she accused.

Kor only smiled. He nodded at what she was holding. "That's a good book. I remember it well."

"Yes, it is." Tavia got up. "Kirdan showed it to me, and told me a story from it. He was surprised that I had never read it. So, I--well, I got interested, and borrowed the book."


"I think Kirdan often is unaware of your different past," remarked Kor. "To him, you are '*Ama*,' and *Ama* knows everything." Kor took hold of her arm, and pulled her toward him, not particularly gently. "To me, you're a tiger, my sharp-clawed ferocious bed-partner."


Tavia's mouth twitched. "You say the nicest things."

Kor moved to the window, and Tavia followed. Tavia was wearing a sheer, silky black robe, embroidered in gold, that belonged to Kor. A sash, tied in a loose slipknot, held it in at the waist. Kor reached his hand forward and pulled one end of the sash. It slithered off and the robe parted slightly.

Kor leaned over to pick up the belt. Tavia didn't move. Kor knew she was half-aware, half-wondering what he was going to do. She expected the familiar---but this night was one for new awakenings.

Kor drew out his knife, which hung from a leather thong that he wore around his neck. It was a long slender razor-edged dagger with a minutely detailed black and gold hilt, which fit into his grip exactly. He held the knife up, looking at it and Tavia speculatively.





Tavia had seen the knife a thousand times before, but suddenly it frightened her. She stared, first at the blade, than at Kor's face, trying to guess his intentions. She drew in a breath, unsteadily.

"You will learn not to fear this knife, Katlena," Kor said quietly. "Learn that it is a part of me."

Tavia made no movement. She met his gaze and held it until he, at last, nodded and glanced down. She knew him well and was aware that she must face him proudly and strongly, no matter what the cost.

Kor reached out and touched the knife to the base of Tavia's throat. She stiffened. "Hold still," he commanded, gently, and began to slowly run the knife down her.

His touch was very, very skillful. Tavia felt the point of the knife glide over her skin, very lightly, with only enough pressure to remind her of its lethal sharpness. The steel was cold. As it passed between her breasts, pushing the robe aside, she shivered. Only her immense respect for this man, her admiration for everything he stood for, and her desire to understand what he was doing kept her standing silent and unflinching.

The knife slid over her stomach, sending a pleasurable thrill through her. As it passed to her lower abdomen and into the blond hair furring her groin, the sensation grew suddenly intense, and her breath came out sharply. The knife was pulled away before it reached the too-tender skin beyond the protection of her hair, and she relaxed.

Kor gave her an indulgent, almost amused glance. He was pleased that she could stand bravely. Putting the knife down on the windowsill, he went behind Tavia and eased the robe off her shoulders. The fabric slipped off her skin with a pleasing sound. He laid the garment to one side.

Picking up the knife again, he stayed behind her, pulling her against him to let her feel his warm nakedness. She made a soft sound, almost a whimper, deep in her throat. It was not a sound of fear, or surrender, but rather surprise, and helplessness. She didn't know if she particularly liked the feeling, but she knew very well how she felt toward this man, and she wanted him desperately.

The knife roved. Its cold steel did not warm quickly. Kor held Tavia pinned against him, his left arm around her waist. His mouth was on her neck and ear. When she squirmed, the knife's point bit a little into her skin. How strong the contrast between pleasure and pain there was with the knife. . . a deadly weapon used for play. She realized that even as a caress is most meaningful from a strong hand, so the knife in Kor's grasp was for her now.


Finally, Kor let Tavia go, and with a catch in his voice, said "Lie down."


Tavia was glad to obey, her legs weak. She did not allow herself to wonder what he wanted.

Kor came to the bed and stood looking down at her. A small twist at one side of his mouth slowly grew into a warm and infinitely joyful expression, which he seemingly wanted to repress but couldn't.

"Katlena, you've more than redeemed yourself already--and I'm not sure I can bear watching you--but I think this is one game I shall enjoy."

Tavia looked at him, puzzled, but her mind and body were more than prepared to join in the unknown revelry. She stretched and grinned contentedly





and reached out to him as he lay down beside her.

* * *

The knife now lay between them, unnoticed. It had been put aside, out of harm's way, as their play had grown more intense.

Kor stretched, and shifted onto his right side. He lifted his head to look at her.

Tavia wasn't sure she could trust the grin on his face. It was provocative, and mischievous. She decided to try to beat him to whatever devious schemes he was contemplating. She picked up the knife--somewhat gingerly--and held it up in front of her. "What does this mean to you, Kor?"

Kor's grin became wider. "It's a tool," he answered. "It can hurt, repair, create. . . and stimulate."

"I've noticed," Tavia said dryly. She cautiously let the tip of the blade touch the soft fur on Kor's chest. He neither looked at the knife nor moved; he continued to gaze into her face.

Growing somewhat bolder, Tavia moved the knife across Kor's chest, then up to the base of his throat. He failed to move even when she threatened to cut off his beard. Tavia dropped the knife in frustration.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked. "You look as if you're communing with the Goddess of Desire or something."

Kor shook his head as if to clear it. After a moment, he said, "I was considering making you my *karushir*."

Tavia sat up quickly. "Your *karushir*?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why not?" he countered.

"What value could I be to you as your. . . your life-sharer?"

Kor laid his hand over hers. "You have already shown your value to me. You're everything I could look for in a killing--you're independent, stubborn, brash. . ."

". . .Arrogant, selfish, yes, I know," continued Tavia. "All my better qualities. The qualities I notice most in killingau."

Kor shrugged. "We have our faults."


Tavia smiled at him, then her expression changed to show her bewilderment. "Kor, you really want me to be your *karushir*?" she asked uncertainly.

Kor laughed, and reached out to encircle her waist with his arm. "You become humble at the strangest moments."

"Stop making a game out of this," said Tavia. "I'm confused--you always manage to astonish me."

Kor's expression was laughing and eager. He caressed her face lightly with one finger.

Tavia closed her eyes and relaxed, but continued to wonder. He was so difficult to understand--his motivations were always subtle and complex. She





reopened her eyes to look up at him. There was doubt, and fear, in her gaze, and Kor's expression of amusement softened into gentle concern. "Is it so impossible, Katlena?"

"I know this sounds a little obvious, but you could have any. . ."

"I know," Kor interrupted. "But would I want any woman? No. Do you think so little of yourself?"

"I think very highly of myself," Tavia assured him. "But I understand very little of what you feel exists between us, much less why you would want to formalize our relationships."

Kor reached out his right hand. With his first two fingers, he touched her gently on the forehead. She smiled and briefly closed her eyes. He moved his fingers down to touch her at the base of the throat, then over the heart, and last on the abdomen. "Mind, life, heart, and creation," he said. "Shared between us."

"I have captured, and possessed you, and still you remain yourself," he continued. "I have taught you the ways of honor and justice, and you have learned them. You have shown bold intelligence measured with respect, and wonder at life itself." Kor was looking at her, his expression grave, his voice full of warmth. "Ever since Salao I've been something of a fatalist," he said. "I lost a lot of pride there, and self-assurance, and knowledge of joy. I learned in prison to see others only as potential competitors and enemies. You have helped me to rediscover delight, and surprise, and renewal of hope."

He went on, smiling faintly. "I have shared the furyfever with you--my thoughts are often on your pleasures, and your body's skills. You are the shadow of my heart."

Tavia closed her eyes and covered them with her hand. She found it extremely difficult to speak. "You show your feelings so easily, and with so much grace," she said. "I feel very awkward and a little foolish."

Kor laughed indulgently and reached out to touch her hair. "You weren't meant to be elegant," he said.

"No, I never learned my manners," said Tavia lightly. Her expression became serious again. "*Ormer*. Alkarin, you honor me. I fear that you give too much honor to this human."

"I welcome your alienness. Everything is new, and different, when seen through your eyes," said Kor intently.

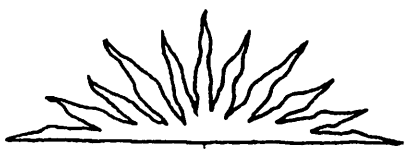
Tavia, somewhat shaken by the depth of feeling in his voice, answered, "That's probably the greatest compliment one alien can give to another." She stared at him, wondering why, if he was so alien, he could move her so deeply.

Kor hugged her impulsively. The familiar feeling of being in his arms brought Tavia back to her more normal, wry nature. "Unfortunately, very few of your citizens would agree with you. Do you intend to make this a formal, public proclamation?" she asked teasingly.

"No," Kor replied frankly. "Opinion would not favor you--on the surface, you're still the Federation prisoner, an officer of Star Fleet Intelligence."

"I know," said Tavia with a grimace. "Kor, I thank you for wanting to do this, but are you sure it's worth risking public displeasure?"





"It can be a private ceremony of sharing. I want to do this, out of respect for you, and to ensure the status of our son."

Tavia glanced up, startled. "Kirdan's status? Since he's your son, surely no one will question his--ah--blood?"

"I would like Kirdan formally established as my son and one of my potential heirs," said Kor calmly. "That's most easily done if his mother has an assured place in my household."

Tavia frowned. "How can you hope to gain status for Kirdan if you must keep this a secret?"

"What matters is that I consider you important and worthy enough to make you my sharer. That will be above question, and so will the honor and place of my son."

Tavia saw the determination on Kor's face as he spoke. He had made his decision, and nothing would change that, short of her refusing him. However, there was a lingering doubt in her mind that kept her from easily accepting Kor's offer.

"What do you expect of me?" she asked frankly. "What gift is proper to give in return for such an honor?"

Kor smiled slightly, but spoke in all seriousness. "You owe me your privacy, all your feelings. You must share with me your life, even as I will share mine with you."

Tavia swallowed hard. "It's a lot to ask, and yet it's more than reasonable. Since I've been here, I've learned a great deal about individuality, the insignificance of 'freedom,' and the importance of integrity. I will share my life with you, Kor."

"So be it." Kor reached again for the knife. This time he held it almost reverently in both hands. He studied it a moment, and then extended it to Tavia. "Take this knife, then, as a symbol of our bond, and a remembrance of this night."

* * *


During the next few days, they continued their discussions of plans, hopes and expectations--during breakfast, at brief moments of privacy, and in bed in the dark. Tavia now understood more about Kor than she had before. He spoke to her long and honestly of her position and importance to him, and the things he enjoyed sharing most with her.

Tavia, for the first time, gave herself up freely to the desires of this man, realizing and joyfully accepting all that was involved in their closeness. She acknowledged, once and for all, all that she had learned from Kor.

But, she realized practically, there was still much for her to learn, if only about the ceremony to come.

"Each of us will require two attendants," Kor explained to Tavia one day. "For myself, I would choose Katni Koerin and Dardanya Atbashar."

Tavia grinned at him. She could have predicted that he would choose these long-time friends. Then it occurred to her that, as Kor had chosen two female attendants, it was likely that she would be expected to pick two men. She asked hesitantly, "Are there any, er, 'restrictions' on whom I may choose?"





Kor laughed. "Well, it would help if they were both here in the *Ormenel*."

"I mean, do they both have to be men, since you chose two women?"

Kor's face twisted into a grin, as if in response to some private joke.

"Yes," he said finally, "they should both be male."

"Oh." Tavia sighed.

Kor decided that he had teased her long enough. He said seriously, "I can make one choice easy for you. We can wait until Karras gets leave again. It would be fitting for my son to attend you."

Tavia thought for a little while--Kor watched her bemusedly--and then decided. "Yes, Karras would be a good choice. And I think I'd like my other attendant to be Theremir Keorl."

Kor looked at her somewhat incredulously. "Theremir? I wasn't even sure you were on speaking terms with him anymore."

Tavia smiled. "Actually, we've been talking quite a bit. I don't think you understand him, Kor."

"And you do?"

"We have a lot in common. We finally had a long talk about what happened with--with Mike Laird and about intelligence work. He sees things much the same way I do. He can explain things in terms I understand--in both Agavoi and System. I've come to respect him for what he is--a good officer."

"So," said Kor, "he reminds you of yourself."

"You could say that," agreed Tavia, smiling.

"All right, all right. I approve of your choice. Theremir it is."

* * *

Kor, who was very eager to hold the *karumkath*, the ceremony of sharing, made the preparations quickly. Then it was just a matter of picking the particular day. They finally settled on a day in late spring. Tavia made a snide remark about holding the ceremony while Kor was in *sarasu*, and Kor assured her that it wouldn't happen.

Just after sunrise, on the morning of their celebration, Tavia was awakened by Kor. There was an expression of barely suppressed exuberance on his face. She reached her arms out to him and stretched languorously and contentedly.

Kor helped her up out of the bed. "Good morning, Katlena," he said. He looked down at her, and gently ran his hands along her sides. He rested his hands on her waist and smiled warmly at her.

"Today is a day for sharing," he said. "Today is a new day. We forget all past sorrows, all troubles, all pain. We begin anew."

Tavia looked into his eyes and said seriously, "Today I will forget what I was. Today I'll ignore all reminders of hardship and frustration. Today the world exists only for you and me."

Kor pulled her to him and they embraced closely. For a long moment they stood together. Tavia could feel the quick flare of heat and the rhythm of Kor's pulse as they held each other.



He let go. "Come," he said, gesturing at the door, "the day is waiting."

Outside in the corridor stood Theremir and Karras together, and Katni and Dardanya. Kor indicated Theremir and Karras. "Go with them," he said to Tavia. "They will bathe you, and dress you."

Tavia looked at him, startled. "They'll what?" But Kor was already halfway down the hall with his two companions.

Tavia looked into the faces of her attendants. She summoned her courage and went with them.

In the baths, Tavia stopped at the edge of the pool full of hot water and looked around uncertainly.

Theremir, who'd been carrying a folded-up piece of clothing and two towels, set them down. He glanced at her and raised his eyebrows in a look that wasn't at all difficult to interpret.

"You," said Tavia, "I don't trust anywhere near me. Removing my clothes in front of you is like"--she paused, searching for a vivid enough analogy-- "is like putting a chicken under a fox's nose!"

Theremir tried to look simultaneously surprised and innocent, and failed at both. "I appreciate the way you look," he said warmly. "Would you like help in getting out of your clothing?"

"No, thank you." With determination born of resolve, she pulled off her tunic. "This is very difficult. I'm sure Kor is enjoying himself thoroughly. But I'm only a human, and I'm getting embarrassed."

Theremir and Karras exchanged glances. They each took one of her arms and helped her step down into the pool.

The heat of the water made Tavia gasp. After a moment, she relaxed. The water felt luxurious. She bathed quickly, and got out smiling confidently.

Theremir handed her a towel. Tavia accepted it gratefully. She dried herself slowly, and wrapped herself in the towel.

With a grin, Theremir produced a small jar. Tavia saw the amber liquid inside, and could smell the cinnamon. "Oh, no," she said.

"Lie down," commanded Theremir. "First on your stomach."

Tavia laid down on a dry towel. She could feel her muscles tensing all over. When a hand touched her on the back of the neck, she stiffened. The hand--she had no idea to whom it belonged--began gently rubbing the cinnamon-scented oil into her skin.

Tavia was torn by shyness and pleasure. The feel of the warm hands work-over her back was sensuous. But she was intensely aware of the presence of the two male kilingau, and was embarrassed at her own desires. 'You and your stupid prudish conditioning,' she said to herself, and willed herself to relax.

"Turn over," said Karras.

Tavia did so, took one look at Theremir and Karras kneeling beside her, and closed her eyes.

"Relax," said Theremir in tones of amused indulgence. "This should be a pleasure, not an ordeal."

"I'm trying to enjoy it," said Tavia through clenched teeth.



When it was over, they helped her to stand up. Tavia was able to smile at both of them, no longer embarrassed or nervous. The massage had worked out all the knots in her muscles.

Karras held up the *karumkath* robe. Tavia's eyes widened in wonder. The clothing was of simple design--a loose, flowing full-length caftan of fine-woven fabric. On the cream-colored gown were sewn tongues of red and yellow flame. The design was so compelling and alive that Tavia could almost see the flames leap. Inside the tongues of fire were dancing figures.

She reached out to touch the robe, her face aglow. "What a beautiful creation," she murmured. She put it on, with Karras' help, enjoying the feel of the fine cloth on her skin. She turned in it, looking down, trying to see herself in it.

"Now you're a Life-Dancer, Katlena," said Karras. He stepped back and looked at her, admiration and delight in his eyes. "I never thought to say this to a human, but you're beautiful to look at. Your hair is like sunlight and fire."

"Thank you," said Tavia, laughing.

In another part of the bath chamber, not far away, a similar scene was taking place. Kor was indeed enjoying himself tremendously. He had managed to pull Katni Koerin into the water with him as he bathed and was trying to tickle her with his beard.

"You're impossible," Katni said, laughing. "A *karumkath* is a serious matter and here you are playing games. Why does Tavia put up with you?"

Before Kor could answer, Dardanya Atbashar spoke up. "You should be able to answer that question yourself, Katni. After all, it could just as easily have been you preparing for the ceremony." Dardanya smiled mischievously.

Katni grimaced; Kor roared. Kor pulled Katni down to the tiled floor with him and hugged her, getting a faceful of wet hair for his trouble. "Just imagine, mother-of-my-daughter, if you hadn't been so stubborn about going back to your own domain, and had stayed with me after the revolution, we probably wouldn't be here now."

Katni smiled, a little sadly, and ran her fingertips over Kor's face. His eyes gleamed with an excitement she knew was for the moment, rather than for her. She hugged him warmly, as one would say farewell to a close friend. "You're wrong, Kor. You would still be here," she said. "Never in all the time we were together, not even when Koshira was born, were you ever as taken by me as you are by this woman."


Kor didn't deny her words. He held her tightly against him. Katni continued, "It's just as well I didn't stay here. Now I can give you in all joy to Tavia."

Kor smiled at her. "You will always hold a special place in my life, Katni. I thank you."

Dardanya, who had been watching them with quiet amusement, now came over and knelt beside them. She brought with her the flask of cinnamon oil.

Kor extended his hand to her and drew her closer to him. "Do you also take joy in my *karumkath*?"





"If I didn't, I wouldn't have agreed to be here," she said mildly. Dardanya never had felt any desire for Kor. The few moments of pleasure they had shared had been as friends, nothing more.

The two women fell to the happy task of anointing their charge. When they finished and had robed him, the three kilingau went down to the place of the ceremony to await Tavia.

The place of the Well was shelter and comfort and security. Traditionally, the Well was a place of privacy, a sanctum at the heart of a household.

Tavia entered the room and looked around in wonder, feeling as if she'd never seen it before.

In the center of the room rose the Well. It was ringed by several lamps burning with bright flame. The Well was filled with cool water. The surface was black and mirrored clearly the small fires.

Tavia took a deep breath, and winced at the smell of cinnamon in the air. She wasn't sure if it was something in the firewells, or just the scent of the kilingau themselves.

At the other side of the Waterwell stood Kor. Katni and Dardanya were with him, as were Kor's young children, Koshira, and, of course, Kirdan. Both of the little ones looked wide-eyed, entranced by the splendor of the occasion.

Kor and Tavia stared at each other. To Kor, it seemed as though Tavia had been transformed into a joyful, bright-eyed kiling, seeming a little drunk on wine, or maybe just drunk on the excitement of life. He smiled at her vibrant warmth.


And for Tavia, who saw Kor each time in a new way, as if for the first time, saw a strong man, his curly dark hair falling into his eyes, smiling in exultant triumph. His power and calm self-assurance were almost tangible.

Karras and Theremir guided Tavia to a place directly opposite Kor. The eight celebrants now formed a circle between the fire-lamps and the water. Tavia smiled at the children. She thought how ironic it was that these younglings, who were so far away in years from such a ceremony, already knew so well every move and word of what was to take place. She nodded courteously to Dardanya, who, even as she had first taught Tavia of kilingau, had carefully schooled her for this ritual.

Their Dance of Life, to commemorate the *karumkath*, the sharing of life, began slowly. It was a very complex, sinuous and twisting dance. The pattern seemed to vary according to the flare and pulse of the fire.

The shadows of the participants on the walls mingled like the flames of the fire. Tavia felt her desires mounting, and wished she could merge with Kor in the dance. But she realized that, by design, the others were not letting her dance with him. Theremir and Karras were constantly with her, guiding her with sure steps and strong arms to prevent her from touching Kor, even as Dardanya and Katni kept Kor so close and yet inaccessible.

Tavia never took her eyes from Kor. The changing light, the leaping fire, alternately put him in shadow, then in the light. The dance became an echo of their relationship. How complex, and yet unfaltering. They understood each other on an intimate level that few people ever attained. Always there was change, joy and sorrow, but there was no longer any fear or hesitation. She





knew his feelings at a glance, and felt his presence like a strong embrace.

Even though their alien ways continued to amaze them both, their differences also bound them together with a hunger to learn more. Just as the Life-Dance kept them apart, so had their differences threatened at first to alienate them. But just as the Dance was prelude to the ceremony, so would their divergences end, finally and forever with this sharing.

The dance slowed and ended. Kor and Tavia were led together; Karras took the children aside.

To one side of the room was a table. There was a plate of meat on it, and a small burning firewell. A cup of wine was being warmed over the fire. Beside the fire lay a coil of silken, ribbon-like rope.

Theremir walked over to the table and picked up the rope by its ends, allowing it to unfurl. He carried it to where Kor and Tavia were standing. As he did so, Karras and Dardanya took up positions behind them.

Theremir passed a loop of the silken rope over Tavia's wrist and knotted it loosely, while Karras held her shoulders lightly. Katni took the other end of the rope from Theremir and tied it to Kor's wrist. Kor raised his hand, smiling faintly at Tavia. "Now we're prisoners both," he commented wryly.

Theremir began to speak the words of the sharing poem:

"Bind her with silken chains,
so that she may not escape."

Katni joined in, changing the verse to apply to Kor:

"Bind him with silken chains,
so that he may not escape."

At a word from Theremir, Dardanya brought the cup of spiced wine to Kor and Tavia. It was a wide cup with wooden handles. She held it up for them; both Kor and Tavia drank.

Theremir and Katni continued the poem, alternating the verses, their voices providing a pleasing contrast, as the ceremony went on.

"Feed him lean meat and spiced wine,
so that he may thrive.

Show her justice and kindness,
so that she may know harmony.

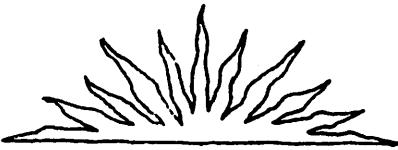
Surround him with the ways of courtesy,
so that he may know honor.

Swear fealty of heart and blood,
so that you may be always together."

Kor and Tavia grasped each other's hands. The moment had come, in the flow of the *karumkath* ceremony, where they each might speak. There were no particular words chosen. It remained to the individual to select the thoughts and the words to say to his life-sharer.

Tavia looked at Kor. He was as far from her as the silken bond between them would permit. He looked very elemental, very much a creature born and strengthened in fire.





"I lay my heart open," he said, speaking softly, yet commandingly. "Listen to me, all who are here. I will speak of myself, a man and a hunter who has always fought for what he wanted. I fought and won a revolution. I fight now as *Ormen*, to make my *Ormenel* proud and strong, and I direct a war to ensure our safe-keeping."

Kor's gaze lingered on Tavia's face. "Now I fight not for my status or honor, but for my life and joy. I met an alien, who so perfectly matched my desires and thoughts that she could have been raised as my twin sister."

Kor looked around at the others, seeming a trifle daring. "There will be those who will say that I could not be satisfied with a woman of my kind, or a woman of the *Ormenel*. I agree. I could not. I defy tradition, and unwritten law, and declare this woman, Katlena Alkarin, formerly Tavia Nelson, to be the sharer of my life and heart."

There was a silence. Then each of the four adult kilingau, Theremir, Katni, Karras and Dardanya, bowed, very deferentially, to Kor.

Tavia looked at Kor, and tried to convey in one smile all the admiration, love and loyalty she felt for him. "I don't know if I can equal the power or depth of your words," she began slowly. "I will try to show my feelings in equal measure."

"I too defy, although not consciously, the ethics and patterns of my people. I have made myself an outcast from my own society, by choosing to like another better. I acknowledge the hold this world has on me; I call it my new home, and wish that I might be named as one who shares in the pride and honor of kilingau." Tavia knew, inwardly, all that her words might cost her, all that they implied about her future, but she said them steadfastly and with deep conviction.

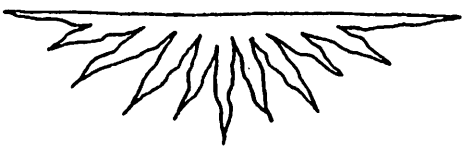
She raised her head and looked at Kor. "I, who never wanted to be tied to anyone; I, who never knew real delight, or pain, or love, call you my heart and life-sharer. You have taught me to be fearless, proud in what I am, and open in my feelings. You have shown me that I can love without surrendering, that my joining to you is not a submission, but a true sharing of all joys, sorrows, and hopes for whatever may come. I acknowledge you, lord of love and war, *Ormen* Kor Alkarin, as my life's shadow."

Kor turned to her and gave her a very deep and ceremonial salute. There was immense pride and satisfaction in his expression. He reached up and gently touched her on the forehead with the first two fingers of his right hand. Tavia lowered her head and smiled, then returned the same gesture.

All at once, the others came forward, and embraced and held each other as close friends. Tavia felt the touch of Theremir's fingers on her forehead, saw him grin at her; she met Karras' strong hug, feeling an inexpressible delight when he reached out to include his father in the embrace. Both Katni and Dardanya welcomed her as friend, and wished her luck. Kor and Tavia together reached out for the two children, and hugged them both.

Kor, made even more proud and joyful by the touch and affection of his close friends, reached forward and grabbed Tavia. The ribbon keeping their wrists loosely joined was a reminder of how close they were. He gripped her fiercely, feeling a fire and a savage delight run through him.

Tavia returned his strong embrace. She looked up at him, feeling an excitement that quickened her pulse and sent a tremor of pleasure through her.





Theremir reached for the wine, and Katni for the wooden cup. They passed a round of warm wine to all. The cup went from person to person; they shared with each other the wine and their pleasure. With that, and the growing excitement and tension in Kor and Tavia, the eight celebrants were once and for a brief time joined, by harmony and the fire of life.

Just before the end of the *karunkath* ceremony, before Kor and Tavia were escorted to a place of privacy, Theremir and Katni joined Kor's and Tavia's hands, and spoke the words that concluded the ceremony of sharing.

"Let them open their minds and hearts,
so that they may gain wisdom.

Let them share their trials and joys,
so that they may know love."



Ceremony of Sharing

Let it be written in the records
of the Domain of the *Ormen*
that a *karunkath* has been celebrated!

Between the stars,
an alien force of great power was met;
a battle was fought and won,
and prisoners were taken.

The proud *Ormen*,
whose name means Wanderer,
whose life shows honor,
the *Ormen* took to his side
one who recalled in him
memories of one of his house.

The human captive,
a female of grace and wisdom,
strove to free herself
of the bondage she suffered
and the warlord who held her.

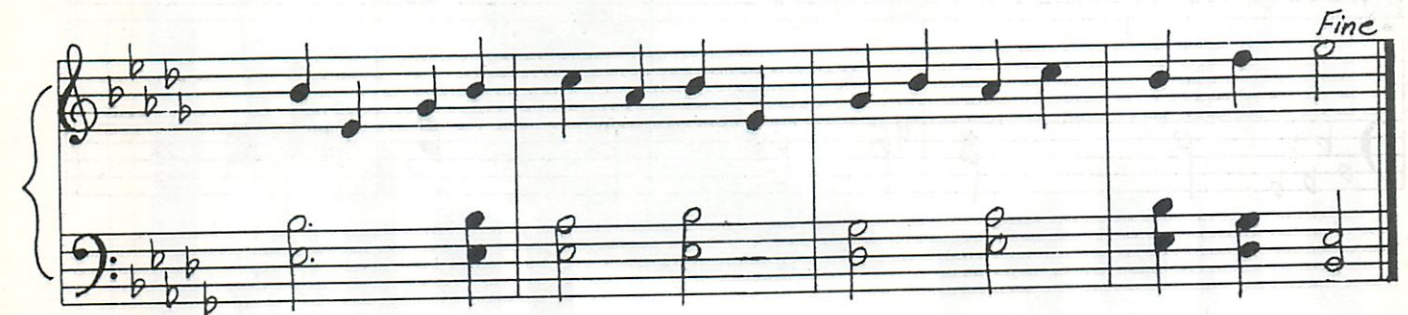
Then slowly the complexity of honor,
and the clarity of reason,
became one with her heart
and she came to live as a killing.

Life-Mother Kisu was pleased,
and in the blaze of the Renewal
brought them together,
and gave to them a child.

The youngling grew
and with him grew a sharing
between the warrior father
and the alien mother
such that could not fail.

And so be it remembered--
that the Wanderer and great warlord
and the human daughter of Kisu,
merged together in the Dance of Life,
swearing fealty of heart and blood
each to the other
with Spiced Wine,
over Flame,
and by Water.

Song for the Ormen





Ceremony of Sharing

Let it be written in the records
of the Domain of the *Ormen*
that a *karumkath* has been celebrated!

Between the stars,
an alien force of great power was met;
a battle was fought and won,
and prisoners were taken.

The proud *Ormen*,
whose name means Wanderer,
whose life shows honor,
the *Ormen* took to his side
one who recalled in him
memories of one of his house.


The human captive,
a female of grace and wisdom,
strove to free herself
of the bondage she suffered
and the warlord who held her.

Then slowly the complexity of honor,
and the clarity of reason,
became one with her heart
and she came to live as a kiling.

Life-Mother Kisu was pleased,
and in the blaze of the Renewal
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The youngling grew
and with him grew a sharing
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and the human daughter of Kisu,
merged together in the Dance of Life,
swearing fealty of heart and blood
each to the other
with Spiced Wine,
over Flame,
and by Water.



Handwritten text at the top: *Waltz for the Hunter*

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first system has a melodic line in the treble and a bass accompaniment. The second system continues the melody. The third system features a melodic line with a slur and a bass accompaniment. The fourth system concludes with the instruction *D.C. al Fine*.



Handwritten title: "The Ocean"

First system of musical notation. The treble clef staff contains a melody starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and a final half note G5. The bass clef staff contains a bass line starting with a dotted half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, and a final dotted half note G2. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db).

Second system of musical notation. The treble clef staff continues the melody with a half note G5, followed by quarter notes A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, and a final half note G6. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with a dotted half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, and a final dotted half note G2.

Third system of musical notation. The treble clef staff continues the melody with a half note G6, followed by quarter notes A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, and a final half note G7. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with a dotted half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, and a final dotted half note G2.

Fourth system of musical notation. The treble clef staff continues the melody with a half note G7, followed by quarter notes A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, and a final half note G8. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with a dotted half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, and a final dotted half note G2. The text "D.C. al Fine" is written above the final measure of the treble staff.



The Hunter

As the small boy ran noisily through the wood, the underbrush exploded with life. Birds erupted, screeching, into the air. Some smaller animals bolted for safety. And one *arsant*, a red and black dappled beauty, took off down the narrow trail that divided the underbrush.

The boy followed it, yelling, until the path got more difficult and as he grew tired. His pace slowed to a walk. A grin split his face as he looked down the trail.

Tavia and Kor were waiting further down the animal track. As the *arsant* approached, Tavia jumped out into the path ahead of it, waving her arms and yelling. The animal swerved abruptly, but was faced by a wall of impenetrable trees. In the instant of hesitation in the *arsant*'s run, Kor leaped, landing on the animal's back. His weight took both of them to the ground; the *arsant* gave out one hoarse cry and struggled powerfully to free its claws and teeth for attack. Before it could break loose, Kor found its throat with his knife, and for a few moments everything was very confused and very bloody.

Tavia only grimaced at the mess. She watched, critically, as Kor extricated himself from the lifeless tangle of fur and paws and blood. He stood up, breathing fast, his eyes lit by a certain fierce excitement. Casually he wiped his knife on his shirt and replaced it on his belt.

"The primeval savage," said Tavia sarcastically. "I suppose you enjoyed making a mess of that animal. Look at you. Your clothes are a loss. You---" she paused as Kirdan came down the trail and stopped to stare at the dead *arsant*. She resumed, "You could've gotten killed, jumping on that animal. For what?"

Kor had been watching her, eyebrows raised, his expression faintly amused. "Dinner," he commented, and turned to his son. "Come, Kirdan, help me carry the *arsant* to the clearing we chose."

In the end, of course, it was Kor who carried the prey; Kirdan trotted alongside him, asking a dozen questions or so with every breath. Tavia shook her head in mock despair and followed along behind.

Further on they came to the clearing, an open circle, between the interlocking roots of five or six trees. They had made their camp there.

Kirdan had recently learned--from practical experience--how to skin and clean small meat-animals. He insisted loudly that he knew how to handle the *arsant*, too.

"The animal's almost bigger than you are, Kirdan," said Kor, laughing.

Kirdan looked stubborn and defiant. "So?"

"Spoken like a true killing," said Tavia cheerfully. "Go ahead, Kirdan. But if you run into any problems, ask your father."

The three of them settled down. Kor began to prepare a mixture with which to season the meat; Tavia made a fire.

While Kirdan was slowly and cautiously skinning the *arsant*, Kor picked up the conversation as if it hadn't stopped. "I enjoy hunting," he said. "I don't have to face Challenges from other kilingau now, nor do I fight as a warrior anymore. I relish the violence, the physical struggle, death and victory. I regret that you can't share my feelings."

"I'm feeling slightly revolted," said Tavia, forced to return Kor's candor. "I'm used to food coming in a package. And algae don't bleed."

Kor laughed and looked down at himself. "I know, I'm a bloody-minded killing lacking in manners," he remarked. "I tend toward cruelty and overly passionate violence--gifts my father left me. I don't defend or condone them, but they exist."

"I know," said Tavia in a small voice.

"*Akra*," asked Kirdan, who hadn't wanted to interrupt them, "how do you take the skin off the legs?"

"Here." Kor bent over his son and the body of the *arsant*, and guided Kirdan's knifehand with his own.

Tavia looked at the two dark heads so close together, harmoniously intent on their work, and sighed. Kor didn't kill for sport; he only killed for food. Even so, the idea of Kor's already teaching Kirdan to take life dismayed her. She wondered if it were her conditioning, or lack of training in hunting, or his conditioned acceptance of violence. She thought it was probably all three.

The two kilingau worked together until the last bit of skin was pulled free.

"Go help *Ama* with the fire, Kirdan," Kor said as he fell to the messy task of cleaning and preparing the meat for cooking.

"But I want to help you, *Akra*," Kirdan protested.

Kor menacingly lifted a haunch of *arsant* as if to throw it at Kirdan. The boy hastily scampered off to find twigs and branches for the fire.

As Tavia and Kirdan made ready for the cooking, Kor bound the loin and haunch of the *arsant* to a spit. Then, once the fire had started licking at the meat, they all relaxed. Kirdan, whose energy was limitless, ran around collecting more fuel for the fire and playing games with his own shadow.

Kor and Tavia smiled as they watched their son and each other. Mostly they watched the fire, which gleamed ever brighter as the evening darkened the woods around them. Though neither of them had mentioned it, they each thought how pleasant it was, every so often, to share a time of privacy with their son. Koshira was away visiting her mother; Karras had returned to duty in the Military.

"Praise the strength and the speed of the prey," Kor murmured, his eyes intent on the fire. "Praise his skill in fighting. Praise the life

he gave up for us."

"How can you be such a good hunter, and so aware of the importance of that animal's life, and yet take such joy in killing it?" asked Tavia.

Kor looked up. "I don't know," he said frankly. "The delight of the hunt is as great for me as the delight of love."

"I'll remember that," said Tavia darkly. "Some night I'll put a fox in your bed."

Kor laughed. He reached out and lifted the spit of well-roasted meat off the fire. It had been basted in spices and animal fat mixed with the juice of an onion-like root. It smelled wonderful.

Kor cut and served it, and the three fell to the meal as if they hadn't eaten in days.

In spite of the inquisitive insects, the eye-watering smoke from the fire, and the hard, rocky ground, Tavia thoroughly enjoyed the dinner. The just-killed meat had a superb flavor, and seemed all the better for the wine and toasted bread that accompanied it. She ate until her stomach cried out for mercy.

"My compliments to the hunter and the cook," said Tavia, after downing the last bit of wine. "That was glorious."

"Thank you," said Kor, smiling complacently.

"Can I have your bones to chew on, *Akra*?" asked Kirdan hopefully.

Both Kor and Tavia looked down at him in wonder. "You're still hungry?" Tavia asked in amazement.

"The hunt made me hungrier, *Ama*," Kirdan said. With a sidelong look at his father, he sneaked a bone off Kor's plate. "Thank you, *Akra*!"

"My pleasure," said Kor wryly. He looked at Tavia. "One forgets about the appetite of a youngling. I remember, the cook in *krasaia* Kothir caught me in the kitchen once. It was after midnight, and I'd crept into the pantry to find some food. He beat me soundly, and then gave me the food anyway." He grinned.

"You must've been a monster when you were young," remarked Tavia.

"I was. And every one of my children has taken revenge on me. They've been just as horrible."

Tavia glanced down at Kirdan, who was intent on picking all the meat off the bone. He was oblivious to his parents. She commented, "Like wolf-cubs, all of you--vicious and playful; devious and lovable."

Kirdan finished scavenging and looked up eagerly. "What's for dessert?"

Kor laughed genially. "You just had it."

Kirdan's face fell. "Oh."

"Come here, imp, and I'll tell you a story." The youngling climbed happily into his father's lap.

"We tell a hunter's story for children." Kor's gaze rested on Tavia, and he went on, "and to those who are like to children in their ignorance."

Tavia smiled, cat-like, at Kor. "I like hearing stories," she said.

"I know you do." Kor threw her an amused look. He touched Kirdan's hair briefly and gently. "So it begins: on a winter's day in a northern domain, a hunter went out to find prey.

"The hunter was tall and broad. A red-golden mane of hair fell down his back, and sprouted from his chin. His friends called him 'Redbeard.'

"The hunter needed to find food. He took with him his spear and his knife. He walked through the forest for some hours. The only animals he found were tiny *sura* and some young deer, which he passed by. They were too small and too young to be killed for food when there was other prey to be found. It would be unseemly for a hunter with spear and knife to Challenge a small beast for its life. And so Redbeard walked on.

"Several hours later, the hunter paused. He heard a breaking of twigs as if by a man or large beast. He moved toward the sound and soon found, just beyond some sparse bushes, a large and noble bear."

Kirdan's eyes widened and he sat up a little straighter.

Kor continued, "The bear heard the hunter as he passed through the bushes. The bear, too, was looking for food. The two 'hunters' stood about ten long strides apart.

"Redbeard looked at the bear. 'I have a spear,' he said.

"'Grrroww,' said the bear, and took a step forward.

"The hunter lifted his spear menacingly. 'I claim your life,' he said, and hurled the spear straight at the animal's breast.

"With seeming nonchalance, the bear raised a paw; the spear, deflected, fell to the ground. The bear stepped forward and the spear snapped under its weight.

"I will fight you with my knife," said the hunter.

"'Grrr,' said the bear. The animal took another step toward Redbeard.

"Redbeard raised his knife. The weapon looked very small next to this large and exceptionally furry bear.

"'Grrrrrrrr,' said the bear, advancing on the hunter with even steps.

"The hunter considered his position." Kor paused meaningfully. Kirdan giggled.

"It would diminish Redbeard's status as a hunter for him to run away after having Challenged his prey, but it was more important, now, for him to save his own life. The hunter turned and ran.

"Redbeard ran through the forest, heedless of the branches in his face and the roots grabbing at his feet. The bear chased him, following

every twist and turn that the hunter made. Redbeard led the bear back to his camp, where three fellow hunters were waiting.

"Redbeard called out, 'I have brought us a bear for dinner if you will help to catch it!'"

"Redbeard's companions all jumped up, drawing their knives, and as one leaped on the bear. After a bone-jarring, skin-clawing fight, they killed the beast.

"They all praised him for finding so fine an animal, and for the wisdom to trap it so successfully. And so Redbeard was well rewarded for his hunt, and his honor was great in the eyes of his fellow hunters.

"And yet Redbeard felt sad, for the bear had been a mighty animal, large of girth and proud of bearing. It could have killed him with a blow. He drank a toast to the beast, praising his strength and courage, and wishing the bear an honorable rebirth."

Tavia and Kirdan were silent as Kor finished the story. Tavia's expression was pensive.

Kirdan was gazing up at his father. "I like your story, *Akra*," he said earnestly.

"Some day, little one, you will be a hunter yourself," said Kor, putting his arms around Kirdan. His son looked up, his face lit by a smile.

"When will I be able to hunt a bear, *Akra*?" he asked plaintively.

"When you are big enough to carry your prey home. Also when you're old enough to appreciate the meaning of killing such an animal."

Kirdan looked troubled. Tavia broke in, "Consider, Kirdan, that the bear, in his own way, is an individual with needs and desires. Like you. In killing the bear, you take a life just as valuable as your own. So you should feel sorrow over the killing, and you should give thanks for the food you get from the bear." Tavia paused and added, "The sacrifice of the beast allows many people to live."

"Oh." Kirdan looked at the remains of their dinner. "Thank you, red *man*, for feeding us."

Kor and Tavia looked at each other, smiling, sharing pride over their son. "You're a good teacher, Katlena," said Kor softly.

"I learned well," said Tavia. "You're hunter, teacher, father and lover, all in one, Kor Alkarin."

They cleaned up from the meal. Kor took care of wrapping the meat so that it would stay fresh. Kirdan broke the fire apart and covered the red wood-coals with a large flat stone.

Tavia looked up at the sky, which was clear and brilliantly blue-black. "I suppose it can't rain, can it?"

"Of course not," said Kor, smiling. "Why do you ask?"

"It's always been my experience that things go disastrously wrong when camping out," commented Tavia.

"Not with me around," answered Kor.

Tavia brought out the ground blanket and unfolded it. "Wherever I put this down, there will be rocks," she said.

"You can lie on me," said Kor. "Stop trying to find fault."

"Sorry." Tavia went over to him and impulsively hugged him. "Ari, I'm glad of what you are," she murmured. "You're a complex, fascinating mixture of a man, and I love you."

It was the first time she had spontaneously said those words. They looked at each other, newly aware of their bond as never before. Kor reached out and touched her on the forehead.

Tavia drew in a shaky breath. "How do you make me feel so much?" she asked, not looking for or expecting an answer.

"I know only what we share, Katlena. I do not know the why or how of it." Kor glanced down and realized that Kirdan had already fallen asleep, curled up by the remains of the fire. He reached down and picked his son up. Kirdan merely wriggled a little into Kor's arms and didn't wake.

"When I pick him up, he wakes up and yells," said Tavia. "He's your son, Ari."

"And you are my shadow." Kor's voice was low and gentle. He laid the sleeping child down in the middle of their large blanket. "Katlena, it's time for sleep."

"Yes, considering that you will wake us up at dawn." Tavia got out of her long tunic and laid down on the blanket.

Kor joined her, pulling up the soft coverlet. Kirdan slept undisturbed between them.

"Speaking of bears, I feel somewhat like a mother bear with two cubs in my charge," said Kor softly, an undertone of warm amusement in his voice.

"You're furry enough and big enough to be one, but I really don't see you as Mama Bear," whispered Tavia, repressing a giggle.

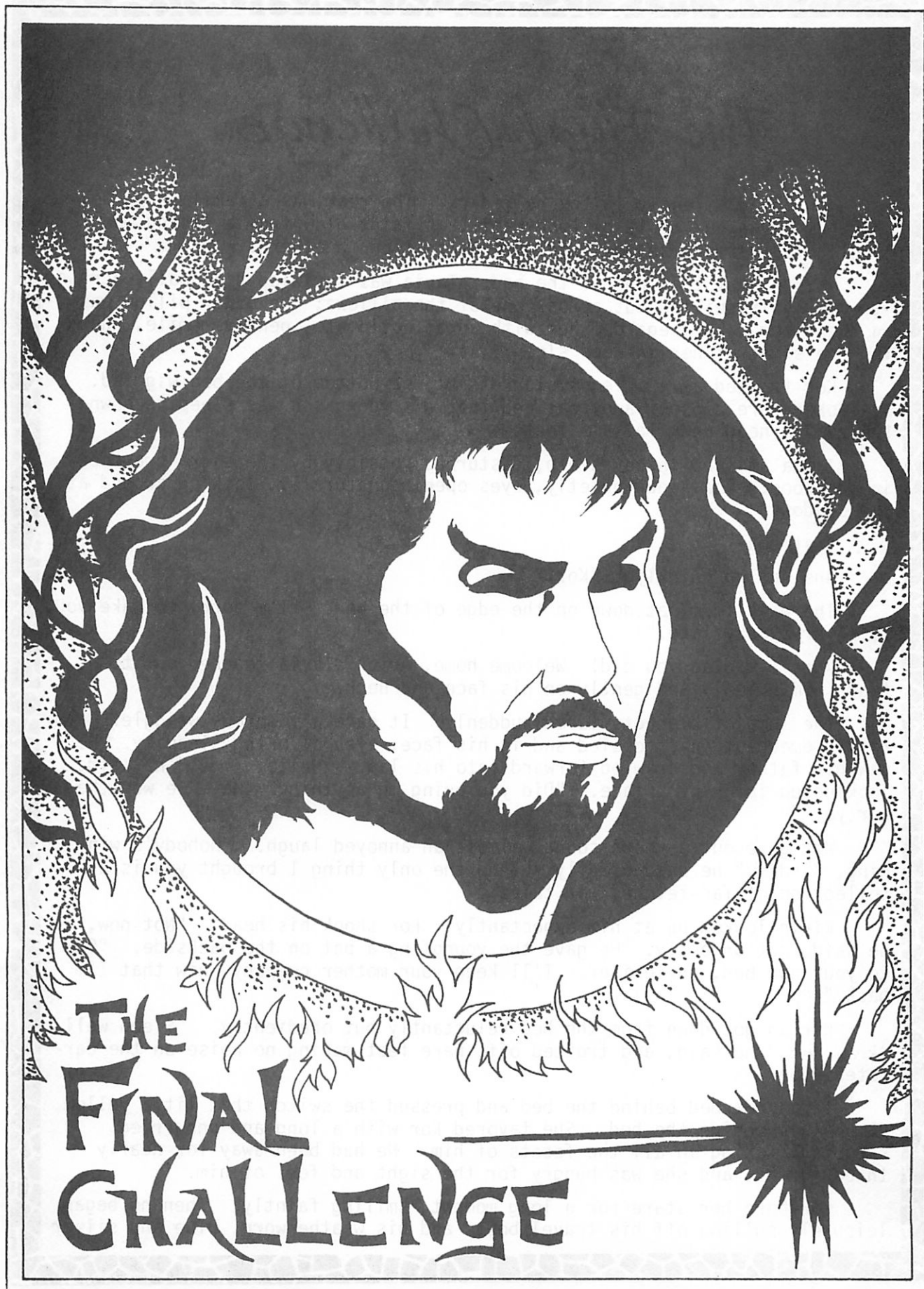
"A wolf then, teaching his two wolflings how to hunt."

"That's more like it." Tavia tried to wriggle closer to Kor. "Then you will protect us from predators, Black Wolf?"

"I assure you that I will," said Kor. He looked down at Kirdan. The child had leaned his head on one of his arms. His free hand was holding fast to a strand of Tavia's hair.

Kor put his arm across both Kirdan and Tavia. Tavia smiled and closed her eyes.

"Sleep well," Kor murmured. "Sleep in peace until the morning."



**THE
FINAL
CHALLENGE**

The Final Challenge

Kor moved silently in the half-dark. The room was a familiar place; he knew his way about in it by long habit. A faint glow from a rising moon highlighted various shapes, and gave definition to others.

He stood by the edge of the bed. Tavia was sprawled diagonally across it. Her hair spilled out across one of the pillows; the other pillow was on the floor. Kor regarded her with an affectionate, pensive smile, enjoying the sight of her in deep sleep.

Kor frowned as a pile of blankets at the bottom of the bed wiggled. He looked more closely and realized that his young son was sleeping down there, his head near Tavia's feet.

Tavia stirred in her sleep, disturbed possibly by the extra presence in the room. She awoke quietly, eyes opening naturally, looking around at the shadows.

"Katlena---"

She sat up quickly. "Kor?"

The dark form sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry to wake you. It's very, very late."

"No, I'm glad you did! Welcome home, Ari." Tavia reached out to touch him briefly and gently on his face and neck.

The lump of blankets moved suddenly. It gave a vigorous wriggle, and Kirdan emerged, hair tousled and in his face, eyes blinking sleepily. He saw his father and crawled forward into his lap. "Hello, *Akra*," he said, looking up into Kor's face. "Did you bring me anything? Have we won the war yet?"

Kor gave out a short sound, almost an annoyed laugh. "Nobody's winning, Kirdan," he said briefly. "And the only thing I brought you is a collection of far-fetched war tales."

Kirin looked up at him expectantly. Kor shook his head. "Not now," he said, not ungently. He gave the youngling a pat on the backside. "Go to your own bed, anklebiter. I'll keep your mother company, now that I'm back."

Kirdan got down from the bed reluctantly but obediently. "Sleep well, *Akra*, *Ama*," he said, and trotted off, bare feet making no noise on the carpeted floor.

Tavia reached behind the bed and pressed the switch that lit a yellow globe-lamp beside the bed. She favored Kor with a long and unhurried scrutiny, taking in all the facets of him. He had been away for nearly three months, and she was hungry for the sight and feel of him.

Kor bore her stare for a long moment, smiling faintly. Then he began leisurely pulling off his travel boots and his weatherworn, blue and silver

uniform tunic.

Once stripped, Kor lay back in the bed, and relaxed all his muscles. He stared thoughtfully into the darkness, finding it hard to fall asleep.

Tavia looked at him covertly, sensing his weariness, and, from afar, his trouble. She did not know what his worries were, and did not like to ask. She sensed that he was of no mood to talk, even to exchange trivial pleasantries. For a short time she did and said nothing, concerned, afraid to make a move that would do harm instead of good.

Finally, unable to stand the strain of having this distant stranger in her bed, she turned to him, putting her arms around him, and trying to pull him closer to her. "Ari---" she whispered anxiously.

Kor turned to meet her, and pulled her head down against his chest. His arms tightened around her back in an abrupt, awkward embrace.

Content to share his warmth, and his wordless love, she relaxed against him and soon fell asleep. She couldn't know that Kor lay awake for a long time, holding her, a prey to conflicting emotions that he could neither resolve nor control.

* * *

The next morning found the *Ormen* sitting at his desk. Theremir Keorl sat opposite him, having just handed Kor a brief report on local events during Kor's absence.

Kor skimmed the report. Both men looked weary. There was a common expression on their faces--defeat, frustration, and shared hardship. There was tension, and sorrow, in the air between them. Finally, Kor broke the silence. "I was dismayed to learn of your father's death," he said gently. "I will miss him."

Theremir looked up but said nothing. His features showed new lines of frustration and bitterness.

"He was a very fine warrior," Kor continued. His expression was grim. "I apologize for his death."

Theremir winced. "I don't hold you personally responsible," he said briefly. "But, ai, Maraku---what good is this war doing us?"

His words were a cry of confusion and grief. As if ashamed of his outburst, he set his mouth and lowered his head.

Kor turned in his chair and looked out the window, to settle his own turmoil and to allow Theremir a few moments' peace.

Kor had travelled throughout the war zone. It had been a few years since the *Ormen* has personally come to direct the battle; he had been ill prepared to face the devastation he found.

Death and violence were familiar shadows to kilingau. But, in this war, death had become a dishonored fate and the violence done was overly perverse and cruel. Ferocity and savagery ruled; no hint of compassion or control had arisen to tame the wild rage of the war.

"This war," Kor began slowly, "no longer seems to be doing any good for anyone."

Theremir looked startled by Kor's apparent agreement with him. "Sir?"

Kor smiled wryly at Theremir's reaction, then his expression became grave again. "Only a sudden and total victory could justify the losses of these past ten years."

"If we haven't managed to carry our battles to victory by now. . ."

Kor finished the sentence, his tone harsh. "We may never be able to."

Theremir nodded. "The people are weary of this war. The pleasure of going to the Periphery to fight *Federen* has worn off. Seasoned warriors are bored of the war; the younger ones have grown to adulthood with it, and take it for granted. You can't win a war with a disinterested military."

Kor frowned. He had just spent many weeks with that military. His warriors were disheartened, restless, and angry. They had greeted their *Ormen* with typical *kilingaven* frankness--they wanted to win this war soon, and they expected Kor Alkarin to do something about it.

"You know, Theremir, I thought--after my successes in the revolution--that I could defeat anyone," said Kor without any pride. "My self-assurance and conceit were overwhelming. I thought that the *Ormene* should be able to take the leader's role, as I had, and conquer the Federation."

Theremir was watching him. His look of distress had shifted subtly to a look of concern.

Kor continued. "But my self-exultant, savage Challenge-war turned into a mere display of arrogant force. The war has failed because I, the Warlord, have failed.

"I made a very grave mistake. A Challenge is meaningful only if both parties understand the cause and purpose. I may have underestimated the Federation's military capabilities, but more important, I overestimated their sense of honor, their dignity and integrity in war. As much as I began this war in answer to their barbarism, I did not believe them to be so totally different from us in concepts as basic as the meaning and value of life."

Kor paused. He looked directly at Theremir. "By the time I learned, too many, too much had been lost."

"That doesn't resolve anything," said Theremir with strong candor. "How many more years must this Chaos last? And how will you bring about the war's end, *Ormen* Alkarin?"

Kor shook his head ruefully, recognizing and accepting Theremir's resentful anger. "I don't know, Theremir. I will not allow defeat. And a dishonorable peace will be no better than a dishonorable war." He stood up, a sign of dismissal. "Hold off the war council as long as you can, Theremir. I will need time to think before I can face them."

* * *

Kor's first week back at the Rasethi Sarin was painful for Tavia. As much as she was glad to have him home, it was worse having him so close, and yet preoccupied with a problem that he wouldn't or couldn't discuss with her.

Another late, quick dinner for Tavia was followed by another lonely

evening of reading while Kor worked in his office. Finally, Tavia went up to bed. To her surprise, she found Kor there, sitting on the edge of the bed. His head was lowered; he was staring at nothing, all vividness and strength absent from his expression.

"Ari---" began Tavia.

Kor raised his head. Tavia was shocked at the grief and anger in his face. She moved to stand by him.

"Ari, I must be able to help you," she said softly.

"There is no help for the fallen," he answered sullenly.

Tavia's expression of helpless question and concern reminded Kor for a moment of the war Kirdan looked when the youngling was upset. The image broke through his melancholy for a moment. His expression softened and he reached out to Tavia.

"Katlena," he murmured. He put his arms about her waist and leaned his head against her.

Tavia ran her fingers lightly through his hair and held him gently. After a moment, she sat down next to him on the bed, taking his hands in hers. "What has happened, Kor?" she asked quietly.

"This war is disastrous. Too many have died; too many homes and families have been lost. Someday, the homeless must return--and when they return, they will demand answers. Their *Ormen* has led them into a war with no resolution. Too many have died without honor, for no reason." Kor looked grim and sorrowful. "And the *Ormen* does not know what to tell them."

Tavia's hold tightened on him. "They wouldn't dare to question you--would they?"

"They would," said Kor shortly, looking beyond her, his face set. "Those who favored my enemies in the revolution will certainly question me. An usurper such as I must--at the very least--have loyalty and obedience from his friends. Even my closest advisors doubt me now." His face had hardened into intent concern. "When someone loses faith, he starts wondering whether another revolution might put a better ruler in power."

"Kor, I think you're worrying needlessly---"

He gripped her with sudden force. Wide-eyed, tense, she stared at him, feeling his anger and fear but not understanding it.

"I have failed them," he said harshly. "Don't you realize that I'm responsible for the deaths of my people during war? They died for me."

"Don't they fight for the *Ormenel*, even as you command for the *Ormenel*? Personal loyalty is a powerful motivation, but surely your people also understand and support the meaning of this war."

Kor stared at her. They had never discussed the philosophies behind the war, for too many obvious reasons. He knew full well that Tavia was speaking with no intended support of either warring side. The Federation, having no one war-leader, would not face the potential problems his *Ormenel* faced.

"Katlena, I wish it were so simple. Consider my present situation. Until Karras proves himself worthy, my chosen successor is Karth Keorl,

Supreme Commander of the Military next to myself--also, the only other person who had a strong claim to the status of *Ormen* at the close of the revolution. His heir, his eldest son--Theremir's father--was recently killed in this war. My war. Theremir pretends not to blame me; his grandfather will not be so charitable."

Tavia's mouth fell open. "Are you saying that Theremir Keorl has more claim to the rank of *Ormen* than your own son?"

Kor sighed, then nodded. "For now, yes. If the Keorl family should decide to seek supporters, or if they were approached by dissidents. . ."

Tavia broke in quickly as Kor let the ominous thought hang. "They wouldn't. They're your closest friends and supporters. How can you even think that they'd do something like that?"

"They are men as other men. Moreover, if the *Ormenel* generally agrees that I have failed, it could be seen as a duty to the *Ormenel* for them to step in."

"But you haven't failed, Ari. You've done a lot of good for the *Ormenel*. This war aside, you've seen to your world's needs and changes that had been ignored for too long. The *Ormenel* has prospered considerably with your reign."

"Perhaps so. But I promised my people more than that. I promised to end the interference of the Federation. Instead, we're back to where we were over twenty years ago."

"Twenty years ago---" Tavia began.

Kor continued, interrupting her. "Twenty-two years ago the Organians--curse them--imposed a treaty on the *Ormenel* and the Federation. I put an end to that treaty by declaring this war. Now here I am, like a fool, needing to establish a similar treaty all over again.

"As much as I hate to admit it, neither side is going to win this war because neither side deserves to. I've come to realize"--his grip tightened on Tavia's hand--"that there is some good to be found there. We are two different races; we have built two entirely different cultures. There is good and bad in both. The Federation has its own patterns of honor and rights; who am I to try to destroy them?" Kor broke off, shaking his head. "I, who stood imperious and arrogant on Organia, and insisted that the *Ormenel* and the Federation would never be friends---it seems hard to believe that that man and I are the same person."

"You call yourself a fool--but it was the man of twenty-two years ago who was the fool," said Tavia, smiling, looking at Kor with a certain amount of wonder and pride. "You've gained the kind of insight and experience that lets you admit to a mistake, and shows you how to make it right. You've learned compassion and tenderness and humility--yes, I'd say you've changed."

Kor smiled, his expression faintly self-mocking. "But I'm still a fool," he said dryly. "It's taken me ten years to admit to failure."

Tavia, shaken by the shifting emotions in his features and the depth of change in him, pulled him toward her. She let his head rest in the hollow of her shoulder. His face was warm against her skin. His beard tickled her, in a very pleasant sort of way.

Time had brought much understanding and tenderness. It had brought a knowledge of when to be gentle, when to show compassion, when to touch.

Neither of them said anything further. To Kor, Tavia's skin felt cool, very pliant. She was the light to his darkness and the water to his sun-fire. He turned to her, and held her very close.

* * *

Kor rose the next morning, feeling tired, as if sleep hadn't done any good at all. He acknowledged silently that his weariness was emotional, not physical, and that sleep alone could not cure it.

He went out of the room and returned a few moments later with a shallow bowl full of clear water. He set this on the window-well, dipped his hands in it, and then splashed it all over his face and neck. As always, it was a fresh, cool shock that sent a surge of invigorating pleasure through him.

When Tavia awoke, Kor was sitting up, making notes on a pad of paper always kept at the bedside. He was dressed in formal black uniform, the only decorations being the symbols of his domain and his high rank.

"Good morning," said Tavia cautiously, sitting up.

To her pleasant surprise, Kor looked up with a smile. "Good morning, Katlena. Did you sleep well?"

"I always sleep well with the right company," she responded cheerfully. "And you?"

Kor gazed at her. "I slept very little. But, my vigil was worth something. I have reached a decision."

Tavia rose and put on a sleek tawny robe that tied at the waist. She sat back down on the bed and looked at him inquiringly. She noticed the change in him--a return to his more normal, self-assured bearing. There was a look of firm pride in his eyes, as if he had engaged in battle and won.

Kor returned her gaze steadily. He spoke deliberately and with relish. "I have decided that it is time to end this war."

His words hung in the air for a moment; Tavia stared at him, astonished. Then she hugged him joyfully. "There's going to be peace again?"

"Yes," he answered, watching her. "I started this war. I will also make the first move toward ending it."

Once he'd said it--those simple words--he felt a great relief. The cost to his self-esteem had been very high--the price of a warrior's downfall. But he had made the decision, had accepted the change in himself, and would meet the future with determined confidence.

Tavia knew, in a very small way, what this decision meant to him. She said, in a low voice, "I'm very proud of you, Ari. The end of a Challenge is difficult to face, isn't it?"

Kor didn't actually say yes, but he gave her a slow nod. "It remains to be seen what the Federation will say. I don't want the end to my Challenge-war to be a dishonorable one."

"Of course not," Tavia said immediately.

"Tavia, you don't have to answer, naturally, but how do you think the Federation will respond? Kor gave her a sidelong glance. "I have misjudged them so often that I no longer trust my feelings. I think you would know better than I how they will react."

Tavia smiled a little. "I can't be sure. After all, I've been here with you the last ten years. But I would say that the war has gone on long enough for everyone. The Federation will probably agree to a truce." She grew more sober. "Now, the actual terms of peace are another matter."

"Yes, they are." Kor briefly described his plans, most of which revolved around a return to pre-war boundaries and conditions.

Afterwards, he went on slowly, selecting his words carefully, trying to share with Tavia the full range of his feelings. He wanted to show her where his hopes lay--not just in the war's resolution, but in the future. "We have each made our claim to our territories and our rights," he said. "I think each side will respect the other a little better now, because we've tested rivalling strengths and skills."

He spoke quietly, earnestly. "I have to hope that the Federation will see what I have seen--that we each, the *OrmeneL* and the Federation, must live independently. If nothing else, this war has proved that." Kor frowned a little. "We cannot understand each other; let us take some time and let the understanding grow where and when it will. I hope for a balance, if not a peace--a time of quiet."

He stared thoughtfully into the distance. "I think that eventually cooperation will come. If we live separate lives, interacting only when necessary, then with respect and tolerance, we might be able to deal well together. At the very least communications and trade can be reestablished, and someday perhaps a cultural exchange can develop."

Tavia was silent for a few moments. The thought had suddenly struck her--that the battles of the *OrmeneL* and the Federation would soon be settled, and that she would then have to resolve her own conflicts.

She stared at Kor, for the first time in many years seeing him as 'the *Ormen* Alkarin.' It was four years now since she'd become Kor's *karushir*. Their son--now eight years old--was in every way a killing like his father. But suddenly, with the bewildering prospect of peace before them, everything had changed.

She thought back to the day, many years before, when Kor had first told her that her fate was dependent on the war's outcome. But the *OrmeneL*'s own fate was now very much in question. And only time and the terms of the hoped-for treaty would decide its future--and Tavia's.

Kor wondered at her silence. "Aren't you going to say anything?" he asked softly.

Tavia looked at him blankly at first, still absorbed in her own thoughts. When she spoke it was from personal concerns. "What will become of"--she hesitated--"Federation prisoners?"

The question startled Kor. He thought first of her, and then of his brother. He looked down, and replied slowly, "I suppose they will be re-

returned to their homes."

Tavia swallowed hard and tried to set her mind to more immediate problems. When Kor looked up again, she was quite composed. "What happens now, Kor?"

"I shall go to the war council, and convince them to accept my views," said Kor simply. "Then, I will go back out to the Border, and talk of peace with the Federation's leaders. I don't know how long that will take-- probably months."

"I'll wait for you," said Tavia in a very low voice.

Kor looked at her, sensitive to her feelings. He knew, but did not want to consider, that this war's end meant nothing but trouble for her. He reached for her and held her tightly. "Remember that you are my life's shadow," he murmured, his lips touching her hair.

She gazed at him and said seriously, "And you, mine."

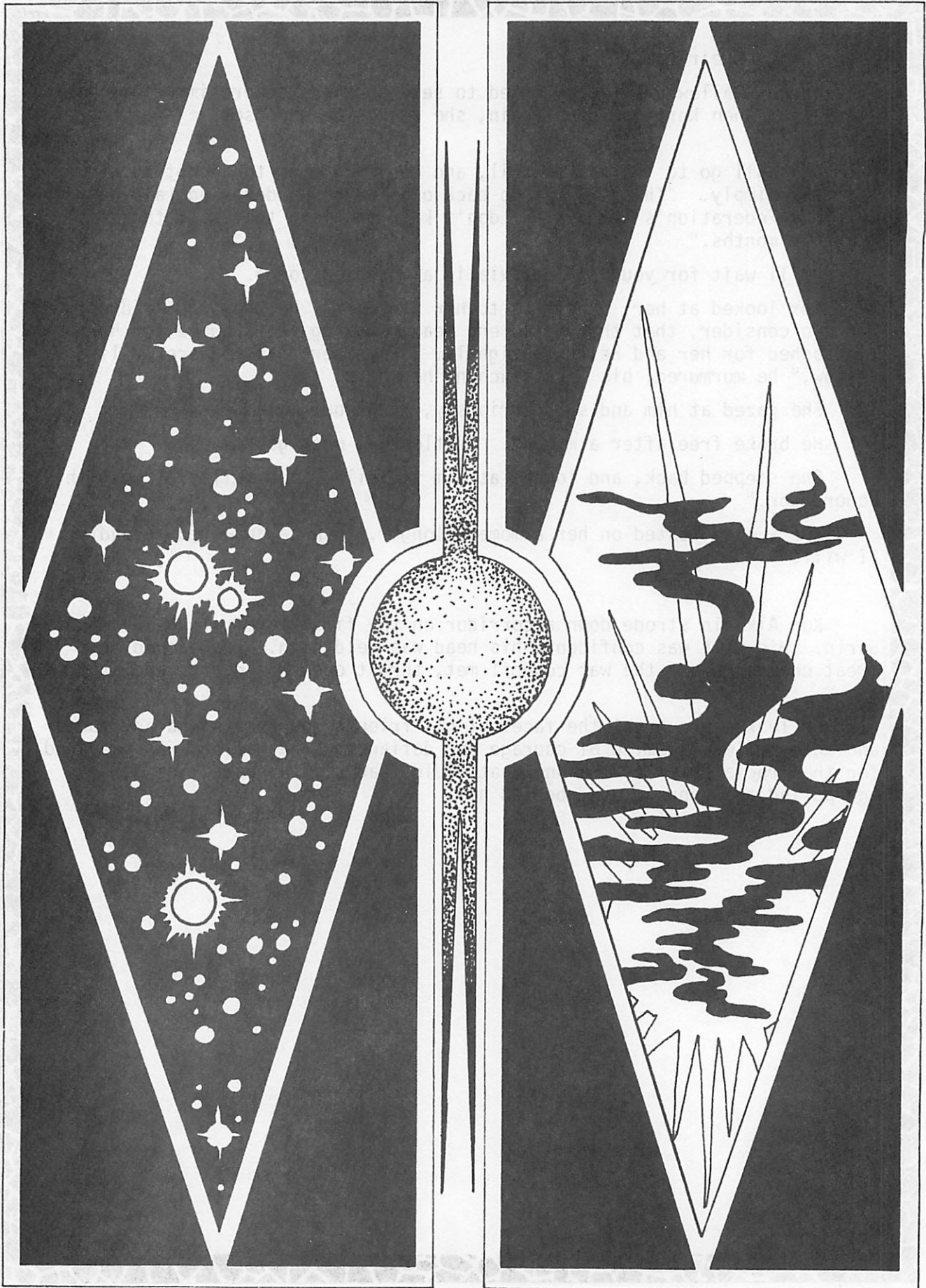
He broke free after a moment. "Katlena--I must go."

She stepped back, and looked at him steadily. She smiled. "Go with honor, Kor."

Kor's gaze rested on her a moment longer, then he answered, proudly, "I will."

Kor Alkarin strode down a corridor on the first level of the Rasethi Sarin. His walk was confident; his head was held high. He reached the great chamber where the war council met, thrust open the doors, and stepped in.

He looked around at the faces of his friends, opponents and advisors, and then smiled, a smile of courage and defiance. The Warlord was prepared for the crucial battle--the one that would lead him to peace. He turned, and pulled the doors closed behind him.



Beyond the Shadows

The black evening sky
looks cold from afar;
an ocean of darkness
that yields only fear.
But there's life in the stars
that burn with fire
and keep for the future
the dreams we hold dear.

Chorus: Yesterday's strife yields understanding;
the time has come for the storm to cease.
Look to a future bright with promise;
tomorrow's gift is a lasting peace.

The blackest of nights
has yielded to dawn,
a sky filled with shadows
to hide the new day.
But beyond morning's grey
must lie noon sun,
a flame growing stronger
to light a new way.

Chorus: Yesterday's strife yields understanding;
the time has come for the storm to cease.
Look to a future bright with promise;
tomorrow's gift is a lasting peace.

Beyond the Shadows

Handwritten musical score for the song "Beyond the Shadows". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The music is organized into six systems, each with a single staff. Chord symbols are written above the notes. The first system begins with a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The notes are: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The second system notes are: Gb4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3. The third system notes are: D4, C4, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The fourth system notes are: D4, C4, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The fifth system notes are: D4, C4, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The sixth system notes are: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Beyond the Shadows

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tomorrow's gift is a lasting peace.

Beyond the Shadows

Handwritten musical score for the piece "Beyond the Shadows". The score is written in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. It consists of six staves of music, each with guitar chords indicated above the notes. The chords used are D, Gm, Dm, Cm, and F. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests, with some notes beamed together. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Staff 1: D, Gm, Dm, Cm, D

Staff 2: Gm, Dm, Cm, Gm, Gm

Staff 3: Dm, Cm, D, Cm, Gm

Staff 4: D, Gm, Gm, Dm, Gm

Staff 5: Dm, Cm, D, Gm, Gm

Staff 6: F, Gm, D, Cm, D, Gm

NU ORMENEL TIMELINE

The following timeline reflects the events depicted in the *Nu Ormenel* series to date. It is not meant as a complete timeline for the history of *Nu Ormenel* and its characters.

(Dates are Solar Standard Time--Federation time)

- SST 2169 Birth of Kor Kothir
- 2197 Birth of Roan Morgan
- 2200 *Ormenel* meets Federation
("First Meeting," Best of Tetrumbriant Vol. 1)
- 2201 Birth of Tavia Nelson
- 2207 Roan/Kirin brought to Kilingarlan
- 2213 Birth of Karras Kothir
- 2216 Kirin/Roan sent to Federation
(Period 2207-2216 covered in "Brothers," Probe 13)
- 2217 The One-Day War of Organia
The Treaty of Organia is signed
("Challenge," Probe 11)
- 2221 Kor tried for treason and sent to Salao
("A Shade of Treason," Probe 12)
- 2223 Kor escapes from Salao
Revolution in *Ormenel* begins
- 2226 Kirin/Roan learns who he really is
("Seesaw," The Other Side of Paradise #3)
- 2227 *Ormenel* revolution ends
Kor Alkarin becomes *Ormen*
("The Celebration of Alkarin," Probe 10)
- Organian sun goes supernova
- 2228 Kor goes to Ashkaris
Roan sent to Salao; Tavia taken as prisoner to Kilingarlan
(Threshold, masiform-D Special Supplementary Issue #1)
(Alkarin Warlord: "The Victor's Right")
- 2229 *Ormenel* declares war on Federation
(Alkarin Warlord: "To Tame the Tiger")

- 2231 ("To Know Dishonor," masiform-D #6)
 Birth of Kirdan Taralkarin
 (Alkarin Warlord: "Birth")
- 2233 (Alkarin Warlord: "Death of a Spy")
- 2235 (Alkarin Warlord: "A Pride of Wolves")
 (Alkarin Warlord: "Two Voices")
- 2236 (Alkarin Warlord: "The Promise")
- 2237 (Alkarin Warlord: "The Hunter")
- 2239 *Ormenel*-Federation war ends
 (Alkarin Warlord: "The Final Challenge")
 Tavia returns to Federation; Roan returns to Federation
 (projected for The Homecoming)
- 2240 Tavia tried for treason by Star Fleet
 (projected for The Homecoming)
- 2244 Karras sent to Federation as part of exchange program
- 2245 Karras assigned to Starship *Defiant*
 Kor and Roan meet again
 ("A Kilington Heritage," Best of Tetrumbriant Vol. 2)
 Tavia returns to *Ormenel*
 (projected for The Homecoming)
 Karras becomes *Ormen*'s heir
- 2246 ("A Broken Sword," Universes in Science Fiction, Vol. 2)
- 2249 Roan returns to *Ormenel*; Karras returns to *Ormenel*
 (projected for The Homecoming)
- 2250 Karras becomes commander of Warship *Kentak*
 ("The *Vakkfar*," Tetrumbriant 16)
- 2259 Kor Alkarin abdicates; Karras becomes *Ormen* Achirinos

Believe it or not, here we go again. . .

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by Fern Marder and Carol Walske

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- Projected publication date: mid-1979

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