



UFOP: Starbase 118 Writing Challenge

**November & December 2013**

**"Treason & Plot"**

Ah, a unique take upon our traditional holiday theme! Chris, aka Sinda Essen and the winner of the previous round: "I was thinking of going all historical and Anglophile with Bonfire Night ... - possibly the only annual celebration over an act of (attempted) terrorism in the world..." Certainly many readers will recognize this rhyme, popularized by *V for Vendetta*:

Remember, remember!  
The fifth of November,  
The Gunpowder treason and plot;  
I know of no reason  
Why the Gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot!

Please enjoy this collection of short stories submitted to this round of the UFOP:SB118 Writing Challenge! You'll find judges' comments following each story, along with a special note attached to the winning story, "Sins of the Mother"

“Treason & Plot”  
Story Collection

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*The judges selected this story, "Sins of the Mother," as the winner for this round and the finest in this collection. Sarah, the writer behind Saveron and the author of this work, counts this as her fourth Writing Challenge victory; the win marks her as a 2013 Writing Challenge Champion (two or more wins within a single year). The story is a deserving winner for several reasons, including its unique style – there has never been another story submitted for a Challenge that is built upon a debate, much less one that is held between two Academy cadets. However, while the style may bring you into the story, it's the content that keeps you there; Sarah turns an unrelenting eye to the philosophies and societal acceptances of the Star Trek universe and leaves you wondering if, perhaps, you've had it wrong all along....*

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## Sins of the Mother

(Saveron)

((Sulu Auditorium, Starfleet Academy, San Francisco))

It was an impressive space, he had to admit it. Even if it was familiar and familiarity bred contempt, the design of the auditorium was sweeping and majestic, capable of housing hundred in its seats and with the kind of carefully arranged acoustics that rendered the PA system and microphone all but unnecessary. That didn't mean that Admiral Adrian West was particularly looking forward to having to spend the next hour or so sitting in it.

At least these days he got a front seat, and with a nod to his colleagues he lowered himself into a seat between Admiral John Matthew Everington II and Admiral Tolira sh'Hail. He gave the Andorian tactician a polite gesture of acknowledgement as he parked himself with the kind of noises his father used to make getting in and out of his armchair of an evening, and yawned behind his hand.

"First one to fall asleep buys the first round." Everington leaned over and murmured.

"Push off Jack, those odds are rigged." West snorted in amusement. Everington grinned and ran a hand through his snow-white hair.

"I seem to recall you giving one of these debates, many moons ago. With Admiral Saito presiding." He pointed out.

"Mmm hmm." West grunted. "And I'm sure she slept through the whole fething thing."

"Ladies, Gentlemen and other genders not otherwise covered, welcome to the 123rd Annual Graduands Debate, where two of our best performing final-year cadets debate a controversial topic of our times." Just incase anyone didn't read the instructions.

Standing on a box at the central podium Admiral Heraan glowered from under his bushy brows at the assembled cadets and officers, pausing for a moment to glare at two old codgers in Rear Admiral's pips in the front row who were chuckling at something.

"As most of you know I like a good argument," the Tellarite stated the obvious, "but they foolishly won't let me participate in these things any more! So instead I give you our top ranking final year cadets. From the Command stream, Cadet First Class William Bourke, and from the Tactical stream, Cadet Vanyeris."

The two cadets took to the stage to polite applause. Will Bourke was a tall, muscular Terran man with rough good looks, sandy hair and an easy smile which he flashed at his classmates in the audience.

Vanyeris was a petite Vulcan female with waist-length black hair that she wore held back with a metal headband, and bright green eyes. She carried herself with the dignity of Vulcan reserve as the two took their seats.

"An argument's no good without something worthwhile to argue over," said Heraan, "and the topic of today's debate is 'We Should Come In Peace'." There was a polite murmur of anticipation from the audience. "Cadet Bourke will take the Affirmative."

Heraan ceded the podium and a first year Cadet moved his standing box so that Will Bourke could take his place at the podium.

"Sirs, ma'ams, fellow cadets and citizens of the Federation.:: Bourke began, flashing his smile and leaning in to the microphone. "The United Federation of Planets is built on the premise of peace. Cooperation between her member species is what makes the Federation not only strong, but a bastion of liberty, sentient rights and equality in the Galaxy. When the first five founded the Federation it was built on these principles, and it is our duty to uphold them and to carry them to other species; potential new member nations."

"The dream is strong in this one." Admiral Everington murmured laconically, watching Bourke expound on the virtues of Federation with hope in his voice and stars in his eyes.

"Mmm hmm." West grunted, watching the proceedings with a somewhat dubious expression. "With any luck that dream won't be dashed too quickly."

Everington gave him a dry look. "I'm sure we were like that once."

"Pfft." West snorted. "We were never that young."

"Peace allows cooperation, peace brings growth and prosperity and a better life for all who partake in it. If we uphold the rights of all sentients to live free from fear and hardship, to grow to their full potential, then we must reach out to our brethren with the olive branch, not the sabre. With every new member planet the Federation grows in potential, which is why in every new First Contact situation, we must ensure that we come in peace. To do otherwise is to rob ourselves of our future brothers. Thank you." Bourke sat down and Heraan nodded to Cadet Vanyeris who made her way sedately to the podium and paused to scan her audience before beginning.

"Admirals, Ambassadors, Officers, fellow cadets; citizens of the Federation." She began. "'We must come in peace'." She let the words hang there for a moment. "As my honoured fellow cadet has so eloquently expressed, the ideal of peaceful cooperation and prosperity for all is the basis on which the Federation was formed; but it is just that, an ideal. And it is not an ideal which all species share." Green eyes scanned the crowd. "Whilst it would be preferable to always welcome new species with welcome arms, we would then leave ourselves open in turn. Consider the Borg, consider the Dominion. Not all species will come to us in peace and so we must be cautious. Peace is always to be held in preference, but we must be prepared to defend it from those who do not respect it, lest we leave our own peace open to exploitation. And so I say, we must proceed with caution; we cannot always afford to come in peace."

As the Vulcan woman spoke Admiral West leaned slightly towards Admiral Everington and spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "I have to admit I wondered how she was going to tackle that one."

Everington nodded slightly. "Difficult. Vulcans are some of the biggest proponents of peace in the Federation." He agreed.

"They're also the Universe's best Devil's Advocates." West observed dryly. His comment was rewarded with a chuckle.

"Yes, we should retain peace as the ideal, for without our ideals and principles the Federation has no basis. But we must be cautious of those who would not treat us as we would treat them. Whilst it would be preferable to come in peace, ultimately we should proceed with caution."

The audience started to murmur as Vanyeris left the podium but died down as Cadet Bourke returned. His smile this time was less bright and somewhat more condescending. "The Borg, the Dominion." He paused. "My fellow cadet resorts to scare-mongering. Yes there are aggressive species out there, governments who might seek to do us harm, but we cannot colour the multitude of new alien civilisations with the one applicator. The Federation is comprised of one hundred and fifty member governments, across thousands of stars, all living in harmony. How different would the map look today, if we had not approached those new peoples in peace?" He shot a look at Vanyeris.

"Don't get personal." Admiral West muttered under his breath.

"Surely not." Everington commented. "This is supposed to be entertaining."

"These two don't get along very well." West said.

"Why? They're not even in the same stream."

"History." And even when Everington gave him a pointed look, West declined to elaborate.

"One hundred and fifty member governments, ladies and gentlemen. Yes other species have approached us aggressively, and at times we have had to defend ourselves. But I invite my fellow Cadet to provide us with an example of when, in the history of the Federation, it has proven a mistake for us to approach others in peace."

With a confident glance at the Vulcan woman now rising from her seat, Bourke resumed his own.

Vanyeris took the podium, her stereotypically neutral expression betrayed nothing. She didn't look in Bourke's direction but rather at the audience in front of her, and spoke a single word with perfect diction.

"Khitomer."

A murmur rose again from the audience.

"What is she getting at?" Everington hissed.

"Shh!" West snapped.

"The Khitomer Accords." She said again. "An example where the offering of peace was a mistake." She might have been reading a computing manual for all the inflection in her voice, but her careful diction carried. "The Klingons and the Federation had been at war for generations until the Klingon moon of Praxis exploded, crippling the Klingon energy supply and endangering life on Qo'no'S. For the Federation it was a reprieve, but that was all. As Cadet Bourke so strongly advocates, when the Klingons solicited an olive branch, we extended it. We acted on the assumption that, at the end, their values were our values and they would honour the peace as we would. History has shown us our forefathers' mistake. Even now the Klingons worry our borders. That is our reward for the fact that we came in peace."

As Vanyeris sat down the murmur in the audience grew until Admiral Heraan had to call for silence from a side microphone.

"Thank you everyone! Controversial topics are chosen for a reason, it makes for a livelier debate! And it is just a debate. Cadet Bourke your closing comments please."

"You're sure she's not a Romulan?" The comment earned Admiral Everington a dubious look from Admiral West. "I mean that's not exactly a party line, and shouldn't she be called 'T'Pren' or something?" "She's following orders." West shrugged. "And she's some ethnic minority from Han-Shir, there's a few of them in the Fleet." Though by all accounts they weren't always easy to work with. "Still..." "What?"

There was a long silence from West, but Everington kept looking at him. Eventually he spoke. "Does the name Bourke mean anything to you?"

"It's pretty common Westy." Everington protested.

"How about Yeoman Bourke? From the Enterprise-A? Bells starting to ring?" He growled.

"You mean he's...?"

"Grandson." West confirmed.

"But surely she's not..."

West just nodded. He was watching with a sour expression as Heraan shout down the noisiest in the audience so that Bourke could reply. Everington forced a more jovial tone into his voice. "Still, you can't punish the son for the sins of the father."

"It's not the father I'm worried about."

Cadet Bourke took the podium for the final time, and his charismatic smile was nowhere to be seen. He seemed to take a moment to collect himself before finally offering a smile that West thought looked about as genuine as his great-grandmother's teeth.

"I hadn't known that Vulcans had learned how to joke." He began. "I asked for a mistake and my fellow cadet gives me our crowning glory. When else has so unlikely a peace been achieved against such great odds, and to such great mutual advantage? The Federation border secured by an alliance with an old enemy, an end to attacks on Starfleet ships, stations and colonies? Because of the Khitomer Accords we have been able to focus our attention on progress and growth rather than an arms race. The Klingons fought at our side against the Dominion. We have hosted officer exchanges and gained new insight into each other's cultures, which can only bolster understanding. How can any of this have been a mistake? I tell you that Khitomer was a success. We must come in peace, because that is the only way forward. Our forefathers were willing to forget the past and deal with the Klingons as they wanted them to deal with us; and because of their foresight and open-mindedness, we have enjoyed a lifetime of peace."

Bourke sat down with a sense of finality and to a smattering of applause which died away as Vanyeris rose to her feet. She returned to the podium with the same dignity with which she'd approached the whole proceedings.

"A life-time of peace." She echoed in the same calm tones. "A Terran lifetime, perhaps. An Andorian lifetime, or a Tellarite one. But not a Vulcan one. Not a Romulan one. Certainly not an El-Aurian one. It is all too easy to view the future in short terms, to forget our children's children and drown out those who urge caution and a long-term view, to our detriment. For, as Terrans say, the leopard does not change its spots." Those green eyes scanned the audience again. They were listening, though few seemed to be finding the experience entertaining.

"Peace with the Klingons gave both sides time to focus on other things." She acknowledged Bourke's point. "The Federation focused on growth, on development, on research, on exploration. The Klingons focused on rebuilding their world and then, their military fleet. And with their military capabilities

rebuilt, they were in the perfect position to take advantage of the misfortune of others." There was an edge to her voice.

"Where the Klingons in their plight were offered the olive branch, following the Hobus Supernova they have offered the Romulans only the predator's teeth. The Federation's own borders have not been spared; every opportunity they have to bite the very hand that fed them they take. Yes, the Khitomer Accords have been proven a mistake; the Klingons are not to be trusted."

The words echoed through the silence, and through the years.

"That's not true!"

The perfect acoustics of the Sulu Auditorium carried Cadet Bourke's voice without the need for any amplification. The murmuring audience was stunned into silence as, it seemed, was Cadet Vanyeris.

"You cannot believe that!" Bourke insisted, advancing on the podium. His face was red. "It's people like you who would sabotage the peace that we live in. People like you who undermine all that we strive for, and damage countless lives in the process. Do you even hear what you're saying, or did you learn to parrot it all on your mother's knee?"

The mutter of the crowd was rising as Bourke broke protocol. Vanyeris raised one cool eyebrow at him.

"Did she even think, when she acted? Did she even care how many deaths would be on her hands? How close she came to sabotaging the peace process?" Bourke demanded. "Did she spare one single thought for the boy left orphaned when she shot his father? I never knew my grandfather!" Suddenly he seemed to realise where he was, pointing an accusatory finger in the Vulcan woman's face with everyone in the audience as witness. Rather than back down he turned and raised his hands to appeal to those there. "Did the traitorous Valeris even comprehend how everything she did went against everything we stood for, how she could have destroyed the soul of the Federation?"

The audience stared in stunned silence, all except Admiral West who got to his feet and, sighting on the tech up in the gallery, made furious throat-cutting motions. Shut it all down, now! On the stage Bourke seemed to realise that everyone was just staring at him, and his hands started to lower.

The PA system went dead, but the Auditorium didn't need it, the acoustics were too good. Unperturbed, Vanyeris clasped her hands behind her back and addressed Bourke directly, her flawless diction carrying over the stunned crowd. "Following the Hobus Supernova The Klingons invade Romulan space in the Romulans' moment of need." She said, every word distinct. She started to walk a slow circle around Bourke. "They prey upon them like animals. 'No hand that does not hold a blade'." She took another step. "They invade our allies and possible future Federation members on Duronis II." Another step. "They attack the USS Drake at Gateway Station, and attempted to mine the USS Avandar." Another step. "Finally, they occupy Thracian space, requiring the intervention of Starfleet to prevent the subjugation of millions of sentient beings." She stopped walking.

"Are these the actions of a people who seek peace?" She asked Bourke, whose face had gone from red to white. It was a rhetorical question. A moment later and she spun on one heel to face the stunned audience.

"My mother knew exactly what she was doing, she simply had more foresight than most. 'Klingons cannot be trusted'. In light of these most recent events, I ask you to ask yourselves an honest question."

"Was she wrong?"

Judge's Comments Regarding "Sins of the Mother"  
(Judge's Character: Sinda Essen)

This could well be the most thought-provoking story I've ever come across in the writing challenge.

I must admit at first I didn't know where the story was going, or how it fitted in with the theme. Although the easy style of writing made reading it very enjoyable from the start. The characters are all well-grounded in just a few appropriate words. It was easy to develop an idea of how Admiral Heraan spoke or Cadet Bourke looked. I even got a sense of how the echoes of the auditorium sounded. Saveron clearly follows the old writers rule very well - show, don't tell.

The set-up is clever, a debate between two high-achieving students. With Admiral West as our eyes and ears the event feels pretty mundane, the sort of lecture you'd expect at any university. This allows the pacing to be pretty relaxed. That sense of the 'everyday' adds a nice element of misdirection so you don't know where the story twist is going to appear from. I was half expecting West and Everington to use the debate as a catalyst for their own plotting which meant I was focusing on them when Vanyeris dropped her bombshell, which made it all the more effective.

The Undiscovered Country ranks as one of my favourite Star Trek films and Saveron's reference of it in this story is a particularly genius move. The themes of treason and plot are obviously major ones in the film, but Sins of the Mother is not a simple retelling of the same story, rather a continuation. Saveron and the characters have the benefit of hindsight, as do we as readers, which makes Vanyeris's argument all the more intriguing. Plus dropping in some SB118 history in with the canon stuff was a particularly effective touch.

All in all, a very entertaining and well structured piece of writing.

## A Past Forgotten

(Suvi Ila)

The lush forest was ripe with the acrid smells of vegetation. Sweet honeysuckle, fragrant lilacs, and pungent mosses filled the oxygen controlled and filtered air in the habitat ring. The chirping and singing of whippoorwills and sparrows provided a musical back drop as rich as a symphony. The ambient light, at 50 percent of daylight, back dropped by the dark of the planet's surface outside the transparent aluminum enclosure lent an ethereal quality perfect for a romantic escape.

Johnna Watson, a tall, blonde haired beauty with porcelain skin and eyes that sparkled like a Cerulean Ocean under the bright noon day sun, sat under the out stretched arms of the Risan Goolkos tree, letting the warm, artificial sunlight bathe her in its glow. Her eyes traced the outline of her shadow on the ground to the point where the fingers interlocked with a taller, huskier shadow cast by a most handsome man.

A single tear ran down her cheek. It sparkled like a jewel. It was a tear of joy, not sadness. The moment she had hoped for was finally here. Hesitantly, with a tremolo in his voice that adumbrated his angst, Thomas was broaching the question she had longed to hear. He spoke of their weeks together. He regaled her with his dreams of a wondrous future for them and for their people. He spoke of undying love and intertwined fates.

"Johnna Watson, will you join me and become Mrs. Thomas Poston?" he asked as he gently held her demure hands in his.

She felt the strength and security his hands offered, and the promise of a future filled with love and companionship. It was all she had wanted since shortly after they had met. Never before had she met someone who had filled her mind so intensely and completely so quickly.

"Yes" she said softly as he kissed the back of her hand. Her single tear became a stream.

His kiss followed her slender arm to the curve of her shoulder, lingering briefly before reaching for her lips. Their lips met softly, with a kiss that held both the joy of relief and the anticipation of a future of countless wonders.

The rest of the evening was a haze. They went back to her parents home and shared their plans for the future. They told Mr. and Mrs. Watson of the grand-children in their future, and the days spent making each other happy. They spoke of deep, abiding love. The joy of a kiss. The anticipation of separation. They told her parents of a sudden and all-consuming love.

Johnathan Watson gave the two his blessing. He told them of a fathers' gratitude that his daughter had found such a wonderful young man who made her happy. He wished them a happy future with large numbers of children and a household filled with the sounds of little feet, and laughing, and joy and love.

No one noticed the suddenly vacant look in Johnnas' eyes, or the puzzled look that slowly spread across her face.

Later that night, as she lay looking through the curved, transparent wall of her bedroom, she stared into the indigo abyss above. Her gaze remained focused on a solitary bright star, but her mind was not there. Bizarre thoughts ran through her head. It was hard to know where reality ended and nightmare began.

Another habitat ring filled her mind.

Barely past dawn, she was in a field on her knees. She was pulling Venetian radishes from the ground. She pulled radishes until the large basket beside her was filled to the brim. There would be no end to the work. When one basket was full, a drone swooped in and hoisted it away as another swooped in behind, leaving an empty basket in its place.

And the cycle continued. On and on and on until an omnipresent siren interrupted the silence.

"Prepare for nourishment" monotoned a mechanical voice, devoid of humanity.

She turned and sat, waiting for the drone to deliver the gray paste that contained all the nutrition she would need to survive.

She was young. She couldn't have been more than thirteen years old at the time. She was one of the older girls out in the fields. She looked around her and wondered what happened to the children as they reached her age. Suddenly, someone who worked in the next row would be gone. There would be no explanation.

There was never an explanation. There was never conversation. There was never any recreation. There was the work. There were the drones. There was the paste. There were the radishes, never to be eaten, but merely harvested. There were fields. There were many fields. They all seemed different, but there was really no way to tell, for a child of one field could not venture to the next. There was heat, and sweat, and dirt, and smell and stench, and sleep.

But even the sleep lacked rest, for the sleep was in the field where the workday ended. When sleep was over, work began again.

Somehow, she knew these thoughts, like a distant dream, were somehow real. She knew that the girl's name was Leialla. She knew Leialla had worked in the fields since she had been able to walk, and would continue to do so for only a short time.

Until the day she awoke on the MedBed. She was clean. For the first time in her life, she was not black with the rancid soil and mud that she worked in from dawn until dusk. The room was clean, sterile, and bright. There were The Others in white who hovered over her, but she could not move. Something held her in place. She was bound by the arms and the legs. Her head she could not move. The Others spoke in words she could not understand.

This had been her first memory implant. That had been the first time she knew language, and order, and fear. But, it had not been her last implant. That implant had not succeeded and she had slowly lost the ability to retain the memories they had given her. She had lost the ability to reason. The loss had not been complete, however, when they had returned her to the lab for re-implantation.

She had retained enough language skills to overhear their conversations. She learned of the children working the fields to harvest crops until adolescence. She learned of abduction and memory implants with memories of false families and assigned loved ones. She learned of genetic manipulation to improve the species.

Implanted maternal instincts would ensure the survival of the species. But, her implants were failing. Again. She couldn't let anyone know. She had to retain her false memories. She had to retain them for a time. Long enough to find others like her. Long enough to start something.

Was it treason... .or revolution?

Judge's Comments Regarding "A Past Forgotten"  
(Judge's Character: Aron Kells)

I very much appreciated the ambition of this story! It's not quite 1200 words, and still it makes a gesture at what seemed to me to be a double twist. The first twist, which comes at the end of the first section, is almost entirely condensed into the final sentence of that section and in Johnna's puzzlement, which neatly becomes the reader's as I wondered why she looked vacant. The second section jumps right into the story behind the story and ends, too, with a question that calls to the Challenge's theme and also provides the second twist, which more implicitly than the first questions the nature of what I just read. The structure, then, is controlled well here, and I want to strongly praise that. My major difficulty with the story is that the first section, when read on its surface, is a little too overwrought and often saccharine, but -- and bear with me for a moment -- I believe this has the potential to make the story work even better. It could be that this highly idealized scenario is meant to be the treason or revolution of the story's last line, and if that's so, I think it's an incredibly clever idea to do so and to frontload that before any explanation. However, I have these questions: We get much less character in the second section by way of thought, emotion, or luxuriating in detail, and so I have a hard time determining *why* the first section would be the ideal of choice. The story seems to be making gesturing at "love conquers all," but if that's the case, I find it odd that -- in an egalitarian, utopian universe like *Trek's* -- the fantasy is very much based in clear gender stereotypes of the twentieth century before. And while the story does leave me with these and many other questions, most of those are productive and don't require the story's revision for me to find pleasure in them. Again, this is a story with a very clever concept, and I thank you for the submission

## No Turning Back

(Robert Falcon)

((Admiral Kyle Colt's Office; Starbase 285 – Earth Year 2380))

“Fools... All of them, fools...”

He tossed his PADD angrily back to his desk, the neatly organized stack of PADDs knocked asunder, then stood and walked over to the office's viewport. His blue eyes flicked to the walls of his office as his hand came up to scratch his neatly groomed white goatee. His office contained the usual knick knacks that one acquired over a lengthy Starfleet career; models and paintings of his previous commands, decorative trinkets from a dozen worlds, and an odd Tarkelian beaver statue that had been inexplicably placed in his quarters back when he was an Ensign that he could never quite bring himself to get rid of. None of those familiar objects, and not even the expanse of stars and brilliant nebula beyond, could return calm to his mind.

Five years... It had been five long years since the end of the Dominion War, and the start of the pacification of Starfleet.

No. This was not a comment against Starfleet's mission to explore the galaxy and learn all that could be learned. Peaceful exploration and pacification were two entirely different things.

He knew what needed to be done. The question was, if he made this leap, would anyone one follow?

There was a chime at his office door. Without looking, the admiral spoke. “Enter.”

Another human, with four gold pips on his collar, stepped through the door. His brown eyes were sharp, and he was young enough to still have color in his hair. Quickly, his eyes turned to the admiral. “Admiral Colt. You wanted to see me, sir?”

“Yes, Captain, I did.” The admiral finally turned. Much as he wanted to, he could not manage even a small smile for his long time colleague. The topic of the day was far too grave. “Grab a chair, Dan. You'll want to sit after hearing this.” Captain Daniel Rainsford approached, taking a seat at Admiral Colt's desk as the admiral sat in his own chair. Admiral Colt grabbed the newest offending PADD from where it had landed and held it to the captain. “Read this.”

The captain did, his eyes flicking quickly across its screen. The further we went, the more his eyebrows furrowed. “They can't be serious...”

Admiral Colt's head gave a rueful nod. “They are, Dan. They are.” The admiral sighed, leaning back slightly in his chair. “Starfleet's analyzed Voyager's mission report and sensor data from their Fury incident.”

The Furies: a conglomeration of extremely powerful races which had once ruled the Alpha Quadrant. They had been cast out millennia ago, though had long wished to return to retake their positions of power. During the mid twenty-third century, they had made their first attempt by sending

one ship through an artificial wormhole, only to be stopped by an unlikely temporary alliance between the Klingon Empire and Captain James T. Kirk. Their second attempt came over a hundred years later, back in 2371, with a much larger fleet and more stable artificial wormhole technology. A five ship combined Federation-Klingon fleet led by the Enterprise-D managed to stop them.

Voyager had encountered them during their long voyage home, in the Delta Quadrant. The Furies intent was to send an entire planet with billions of their people and an armada of ships through a massive artificial wormhole to launch their final invasion of the Alpha Quadrant. Voyager's crew managed to deflect their wormhole, halting this last attempt.

Admiral Colt continued. "The science folks at Starfleet Command have concluded that the Furies were, in fact, sent into the Small Magellanic Cloud galaxy. Almost 200,000 light-years away. Thus, they conclude that the Furies are no longer a threat to the Alpha Quadrant. Therefore, Starfleet Command will no longer train any new cadet as to the existence of the Furies."

Captain Rainsford's head shook slightly. "Why, sir? Are they afraid they'll make the kids wet their pants unnecessarily, or something?"

The admiral also shook his head. "No... No, it's not that. It's a continuation of the trend which started five years ago." He reached up to his face, scratching at his goatee once again. "Starfleet Command does not want to even consider the possibility of another war."

"Can you really blame them, though?" Captain Rainsford leaned forward, elbows against his legs. "I mean... We took major losses against the Dominion. Earth itself got hit."

"I know," the admiral said. "I was there."

"So far, the Dominion has been abiding by the peace treaty. The Furies..." He paused in thought for a moment before he continued. "200,000 light-years is pretty blasted far."

Admiral Colt nodded. "It is, Dan. Yet..." He gestured to the now disorganized pile of PADDs between them, "I've never seen any verification that the Dominion abide by the treaty. No reconnaissance missions, barely any visits to the Gamma Quadrant. For all we know, they've been rebuilding their forces on the other side of the Bajoran wormhole and will strike us next week. Every time I hear of anyone suggesting we get a ship or two over there on a permanent basis, to continue our mission of exploration, of course, is shot down. 'We don't want to offend the Dominion' they say."

The captain sighed, his eyes dropping. Admiral Colt knew that Captain Rainsford agreed with him. His old friend was also an optimist. That made him a pretty solid devil's advocate to the admiral's pessimism. "What of Constable Odo, though? The reports I read indicated he'd rejoined the... what was it called? The Great Link? If all the Founders are connected, then I doubt they'd be able to plan anything like this without him knowing."

"Who says he wouldn't know?" the admiral asked. "Him against an entire planet of his people. Now, I didn't know him, personally, and I only have respect for him based on what I've read, but I don't know of anyone who could stand up to that kind of peer pressure."

Captain Rainsford considered for a moment, before sighing and shaking his head yet again.

"And when it comes to the Furies," Admiral Colt said, "200,000 light-years is nothing to people who have working artificial wormhole technology. A wormhole took them to... where ever they landed. A wormhole could easily bring them back." The admiral leaned forward once again. "Starfleet has forgotten why a strong defense is required. If not for the Dominion, if not for the Furies, then for whoever the next force is that will try to strip the people of the Federation of their way of life. Eternal vigilance, Dan. THAT is the price of liberty."

The captain's face started to turn red. It was clear that he was growing steadily more uncomfortable with the conversation. He shook his head once more. "That's... That's not how Starfleet is seeing this. Our vigilance is in our patrols, our long-range sensors, our ability to see what's coming and prepare for the hit."

Admiral Colt's voice calmed, trying to sooth his old friend's nerves. "It's making sure that we're strong enough that no one dares hit us."

The captain's head shook almost constantly. "That's not what the Federation stands for. It's not what the people want!"

"I know it's not, Dan," the admiral said, his voice still calm but now firm. "That's where we come in. When our leaders are no longer willing to make the tough calls for the benefit of the Federation, it's our responsibility to find leaders who will."

There was absolute silence in the admiral's office as both men considered the implications of that statement. It was Captain Rainsford who spoke first, his voice quiet but his tone direct. "You're talking about a mutiny."

Admiral Colt shook his head. "No. I'm talking about a coup."

The words had been uttered. There was no going back.

"Admiral... It can't be as serious as that, can it? There must be another way."

"There isn't," the admiral replied. "I've tried to get my point across over every official channel, and all the unofficial ones I have. Even those who agree with me refuse to act, or to even speak on my behalf. I see no other way to convince the Federation of the truth."

Captain Rainsford was silent for several long moments as he considered all that had been said over the past minutes. "You're asking me if I agree with you? And if I'll join you?"

Admiral Colt nodded. "That is correct."

"You realize that we can't do this alone."

Another nod. "That is also correct. And I don't fool myself into thinking our fleet's captains will be easy to convince... though I do believe they will come around."

"And if we fail, we'll be considered traitors of the Federation."

The admiral actually gave a quiet chuckle at that. "Dan, I am fairly certain that we'll be considered traitors even if we succeed. What matters is the future of the Federation, and its survival, even if we're not there to see it."

Captain Rainsford gave one last sigh... and a very slow nod. "Well, then, Admiral... Where do to start?"

Judge's Comments Regarding "No Turning Back"  
(Judge's Character: Sinda Essen)

This topic lent itself to some interesting and thoughtful stories and No Turning Back was a very strong take on the theme.

The arguments that Admiral Colt puts forward are entirely reasonable, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance as he very aptly puts it, and Colt is acting out of the best interests of the Federation. As a character, Colt is perfect for this story. Falcon presents his readers with an officer who is planning treason, and yet for all the right reasons. Typically the plotter would be a bad guy, but Falcon doesn't write Colt as such. Instead he gives us a man who's trying to do his best but is held back by Federation bureaucracy, a very sympathetic character.

Structurally, the story is spot on. Considering it consists simply of a conversation between two characters Falcon makes the most of the lean set up. A quick description of the office sets the scene and adds some nice touches and almost all of what follows is dialogue. While that could be a weakness in other stories it is a strength here and Falcon doesn't waste a single word.

I like stories that make me think, and No Turning Back certainly achieved that. It left me considering a very interesting dilemma - who's to say Colt is wrong? If I were in Captain Rainsford's shoes, would I agree to go along with the coup, too, despite the consequences?

## Operation Remember (Hannibal Parker)

((Space Station Deep Space Nine, at the close of the Dominion War))

Hannibal Parker was tired. Two years of almost constant war with the Jem' Hadar and their Breen allies had wreaked havoc on the quadrant. Billions were dead, planets wrecked, and hundreds of ships lost. Earth had been attacked by the Breen, shattering the idyllic myth of Earth. They too had been singed by the flames of war. The fighting on the surface of Cardassia before the surrender had been brutal, hampered by the fact that fifty percent of their troop transports had been shot down...but still, his unit fought on, buoyed by the Klingon detachment his unit had been fighting with almost since the war began.

With peace now won, and several barrels of blood wine consumed by his unit and the victorious Klingons (despite "suggestions" from Starfleet brass that they should not be participating in such ceremonious drunkenness and revelry), Hannibal, now in command of his own platoon, ignored it. His battle-hardened Marines, having fought alongside the Klingons, were deemed more than worthy to share in their celebration, and there was no way he was going to stand in their way. So...while Admirals, Captains, and Heads Of State were somberly signing surrender orders and giving interviews to the Federation News Service, his troops were drinking, singing, and seeking companionship, whether it be Klingon, Human, Bajoran, or any of a number of races sexually compatible with humans, and Hannibal was no exception. With three weeks' leave coming to his platoon and currently berthed in the Habitat Ring, he was perfectly happy to let the ringing hangover he was currently suffering from subside long enough to further enjoy the Orion woman currently sharing his bed. Feeling her stir next to him, he did what a good soldier does...his duty....

One week into his leave, Hannibal discovered peace was not all it was cracked up to be. He found it strange to sleep through the night, and it was perfectly normal for him to sleep with either his Bowie knife or phaser within reach. Starfleet had Counselors available, but they were backed up on appointments from seeing Starfleet personnel...most of whom had seen no ground fighting. Starship duty had its horrors, but none compared to staring a drug-crazed Jem' Hadar in the face and blowing it off, or sliding your blade through his body. He determined he would have nothing to do with the "couch mice" who were currently infesting the station, and Starbase 375, places where beings went off to war, and some never came back, and others who should not have.

There was also a repeated undercurrent...one which was playing out through the Marines and Starfleet personnel...a current of unfinished business. There were those who were ecstatic that Cardassia was little more than smoking ash, and more than a little animosity directed towards the Breen...who had managed to escape their murderous alliance with the Dominion with it seemed little more than a finger-wagging, in the face of the fact that the Breen had attacked Earth, namely Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco. Thousands were killed, Starfleet was crippled, and there seemed to no desire for the Federation, or Starfleet, to demand the proper penance for the Breen to pay. Nursing a whiskey in Quarks' bar, Hannibal was alone, contemplating his plans for the evening. He had begun working out again, and his body welcomed the slight soreness he was feeling. Dressed in civilian clothing, black cargo pants with matching black tee shirt, his considerable muscle bulging from rolled up sleeves, his freshly shaved head and shined, laced up black boots clearly identified him as a soldier, even when not in uniform. Hannibal barely looked up as another gentleman walked in. Hannibal immediately recognized him as a soldier, although he was smaller, than but almost as tall as the six foot four Hannibal. He was older, with greying

hair at his temples, and steel gray eyes. Hannibal knew exactly who he was, and he thought it strange that a man of his stature would enter the likes of an establishment like Quarks'. Generals in the Starfleet Marines just did not do such things...unless they had a reason...and as he closed on Hannibal's' table, he had to wonder what his reasoning would be to come to see him, here, on leave...As the human approached, he began to smile, but his eyes held firm, locked on his. "Hannibal Parker I presume?"

Hannibal took another swig of his whiskey, hearing the ice tinkle in the glass. He had paid good money for the whiskey, and gave an upward glance at the man who stood before him...  
"Depends on who is asking. And you are?"

"May I sit down? I would like to keep our conversation away from prying ears as much as possible." Quarks' was known as the place where everything was up for grabs, and for sale...that included information, and as Hannibal looked around the room, the lack of obvious Starfleet personnel and the abundance of disreputable aliens and humanoids made his choice easy, to limit suspicion. Nodding to the empty chair across from him, he beckoned the General to have a seat...

"I know who you are, General Murphy. You led the assault to take back Betazed, secure AR-558...and took down a Breen warship which had attacked Earth. Your reputation precedes you."

The General sat down. And smiled. He was pleased Hannibal knew who he was, but now it was his turn to express to Hannibal that he knew him as well...  
"Captain Hannibal Tiberious Parker. Member of the 27th Marine Expeditionary Unit, combined with the 282nd Unit of the Klingon Defense Forces. Took down two planets during the First Battle Of Chin'toka, captured a weapons platform, first on the ground on Cardassia, plus early on your combined unit was winning engagement after engagement with the Jem' Hadar and the Cardassians while everyone else was getting the snot beat out of them. You guys were making us proud, Captain....and I'm sorry to hear about your parents. I am sure they died with honor..."

Hannibal had been around long enough to tell the difference between genuine concern and garbage when he heard it, and out of respect, he nodded as the General had paid his respects. Looking back towards him, he took another swig of his drink, pulled a cigar from his shirt pocket, and lit it with his fathers' ancient Zippo lighter...  
"General...I appreciate your condolences, but I know that is not why you came here to speak to me. What is it you really want?"

The General sat back in his chair and regarded the massive, young Marine. He had seen more combat in two years than the General had seen in twenty, and the younger Marines' rather flippant attitude was something he had been warned about, but Hannibal had earned a reputation for being ruthless in battle, so much so that even the Klingons respected and honored him. It was that kind of grit and toughness the general needed for what he had in mind. Leaning over to make sure only Hannibal could hear him in the crowded bar, Murphy began..." The war may be over, but things are far from settled. Some races did not truly pay for their transgressions against Federation citizens. Against Earth. Against San Francisco." Before Hannibal could speak, the General's wording was clear...he was talking about attacking the Breen. Spoken resentment was now breeding actions, and the General was recruiting others who had voiced the same opinion. Hannibal maintained his poker face, belying none of his true feelings as the general continued to speak...

“There is a meeting tonight. Docking Port Three, upper pylon. Tell the sentry I sent you, that is if you want to make a difference instead of getting drunk, kicking [...] or chasing whores...Consider my offer, Mister Parker. We begin at 1800.” Leaning in closer to Hannibal, the General added one last thing, perhaps the most important thing he could say... “This conversation never happened.”

With mutual discrete nods exchanged, the General stood up, and Hannibal watched the officer leave. Pulling a drag off his cigar, and motioning the dabo girl who had been serving him to bring him another drink. He had about three hours to consider the Generals’ offer, one he would give considerable thought to. There was no doubt in his mind what he had in mind, but in Hannibal’s’ mind, it would be worse than treason. As much as he would love to leave the Breen home world a smoking cinder in space, the war was over. Although it was costly in men and treasure, victory was theirs. During the war, he would have happily scorched every Breen ship or planet in his sights, but that time was past. The words of his now-dead father rang in his ears...” There is no honor in battle once the enemy has surrendered.” To Hannibal, to even say the word “Breen” left a bad taste in his mouth...

Two hours later, particularly well lubricated by copious amounts of real bloodwine and whiskey, Hannibal had to make a decision...well actually, two. The first was whether to tell anyone of the generals’ plans, and the second...who to tell? What if he said nothing and the general did carry out his attack on the Breen? They would be at war again, this time the Federation, and Starfleet, would be the aggressors...and he would once again be the tip of the spear. He figured that the general would count on the “code of silence” which would keep his plans secret, even though he decided not to participate. The more he thought about it, the angrier he got. He had a sister on Earth who was now his only living relative, and what if his actions indirectly caused her death? Hannibal didn’t want that...this war had deprived them of their parents in a just cause, but this...revenge on a planetary scale?

Hannibal then thought about the general, how clean he was. He may have commanded Marines, but he did not have the mark of a man who had seen combat, but saw no difficulty in ordering others to die to further the mission. There were few brass who had ever fought such a grueling campaign they had just finished, and men like that were reluctant to throw men into the fray while they stood back and orchestrated the outcome. Hannibal had been a pawn long enough to men like that. First was Chancellor Gowron, who threw Klingon warriors into the teeth of the Jem’Hadar to further his political aims. More than once it was only timing and dumb luck which had saved their combined unit from disaster from those orders, and Hannibal was not going to do that again, to follow the orders of a madman to further his ego.

The first decision...not to go along with the general, was relatively easy. The second question was more daunting. Hannibal knew that he had to tell someone what was being planned, but there were few he could trust with the explosive claims...and that was all they were...with nothing to support it. He had no evidence, no documentation, nothing. He was a grunt going against a Starfleet general, accusing him of treason. He also had no idea how high up the food chain it went, possibly clear up to Admiral Ross. He now had forty-five minutes left to figure out what to do. He looked around the crowded bar, and looked for faces that had been there as long as he had. He was looking for Starfleet personnel who had been there as long as he had. It was relatively early, as the ships currently docked would have most of their crews on liberty, but most did not visit Quark’s until later in the evening...also, if there were those who favored the generals’ views, they would be watching him, checking his next move. He knew who to look for, and in fact, the place had turned over its crowd to such an extent that determining if he was being watched was difficult. At 1745, it was time to make a move. Closing out his tab, Hannibal left Quark’s, and headed out onto the Promenade. Being familiar the layout of Deep Space Nine, instead of

making his way to the lift which would take him to the location of the meeting, he headed for the nearest empty corridor and made his way into the access trunks which ran the height and breadth of the massive station. If he was being followed, they would have to come this way, and he waited a perilously long three minutes before he started his climb up the trunk to just outside Ops. It was only two decks, but he knew where he needed to be and come out unseen. His destination: The office of Archer Greene, Starfleet Intelligence.

Hannibal popped out of the access trunk, a bit dirty and a little dizzy... the liquor was catching up to him, but after making sure he would not be observed, he popped the hatch on the access trunk, replaced it, and made his way to Greene's office.

Hannibal didn't like the man much, but he had been invaluable on board the Charleston to his unit when they deployed. He was a snug little snit, but he knew his job and could extrapolate with the best of them. Making sure he was not observed, Hannibal went down the hallway where the mans' office was now located, in a space not much bigger than a broom closet...in fact, it was a broom closet, with not even a sign on the door denoting its use, the only thing giving it away was the security lock on the door. Feverishly trying the lock, Hannibal worked every conceivable combination he could think of, when the door opened...

Greene was sitting at his desk, decorated solely by a computer terminal and a stack of PADDs. He was a shorter man, about five foot eight, mid- thirties, with a shock of gray mixed in with brown hair. He was thin, and his skin was pale from being too long on board a space station or a starship, his clear blue eyes taking in the mountain of young Marine with a slight [...] of his head. He wasn't quite sure why the Marine didn't just knock, and he was in no position to fight him. Greene had seen his handiwork in person, and he knew he was no match for him. His best bet was to do what he was good at...extrapolating information from what he saw and heard, and he surmised the Marine has something very important he needed to tell him. In a calm voice, he called out to the man who was now less than ten feet away from him and staring him down the way a predator would eye his next meal...  
"Mister Parker...you could have knocked", he said. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Hannibal was now standing before the intelligence officer...it was now five minutes before the meeting was to begin. Standing before Greene's desk, Hannibal knew it was now or never. He told him of meeting the general, what he had planned, where the meeting was to take place, and that he had been invited to attend. The intelligence officer listened intently, then leaned back in his office chair...which was scant inches from the bulkhead behind him, and Hannibal wondered if he had made a mistake, and Greene was part of the plot. His mind raced in the silence which had permeated the room since Hannibal had finished his explanation, and Hannibal had begun to think of scenarios on how to escape Deep Space Nine before he himself was caught. If he was wrong in his assessment, his sister would still lose him...not to war, but to becoming a fugitive. Finally, with the meeting time approaching, the intelligence officer spoke...

"That's quite a story, Mister Parker", he said. "You are aware that those are serious charges you are leveling against a decorated Starfleet officer, a man many would consider a hero?"

"It may be one hell of a story, but it's the truth", Hannibal said. "Why the frak would I have been trying to pick the lock on your office door to lie to you? I have no evidence other than a conversation I had three hours ago. Either you believe me or you don't. General Murphy wants to start a war, so what the hell are you going to do?"

Greene looked at Hannibal, a man whom he would now test the trust between them. Working with Hannibal on board the Charleston, Greene knew he was a man of honor, and the PADD which held details of the meeting Hannibal had just confirmed lay concealed on his desk under his hands. That PADD held names, dates, places...even the targets in Breen space. Hannibal had only scratched the surface on how big the plot really was, but sharing that information was something he could not do with him. Looking up at the Marine, who now seemed to be taking up the entire office, he made a note on a PADD, then he looked up at the brooding killing machine which was Hannibal Parker...

"Hannibal," he said, choosing his words carefully, "There is a transport leaving for Risa in fifteen minutes. Be on it. Speak to no one. Burn the rest of your leave time there. Leave the way you came. Report back to your unit on time. Is that clear?"

Hannibal looked deeply in his eyes. There was no deception there, and the unspoken message was clear...Nodding his head in understanding, Hannibal spoke:

"Risa is nice this time of year. Thank you...and good luck."

Leaving Greene's office, Hannibal did as he was instructed and went to Risa. Returning from leave, news broke about a Dominion War hero being arrested. The hero...General Simon Murphy.

Judge's Comments Regarding "Operation Remember"  
(Judge's Character: Kali Nicholotti)

There is a kind of grit that is laced throughout this entry from the very beginning, conveying the idea of a tough natured Marine who had been through plenty. It also set up the idea that the man wasn't happy with how things turned out. Throughout the story, readers get a good sense of the back-story and of events that have lead up to the moment we are glimpsing, and the use of imagery throughout did a good job of pointing out just how this character was thinking and why. And just when you think you understand, and maybe even share, in his depression, both reader and character are struck with the solution – an out, offered from an unlikely source. As a reader, it seemed to be a no-brainer; take the opportunity and live knowing that you did what you could to make things right. After all, the story seemed to set this character up to do just that.

But that's when we all, as readers, get a surprise. Though I found the end somewhat rushed and less dramatic or gritty, or image provoking as the beginning (perhaps because the writer was running out of words/space – a constraint I understand), we find our battle hardened Marine doing just what we thought he wouldn't do; going against his own thoughts and doing the morally right thing.

Overall, I think this was a well written story. In the future, the only feedback I might offer to the writer is to delve more into a realm that is unknown (perhaps through a character not as well defined as Parker) and avoid the clichés if only to get some experience writing perspectives and situations that aren't as often seen or followed by writers/screenwriters/etc. Such exploration may net a true gem, even to those who know your writing well. With This story, as it stands, however, is good and I appreciate that you took the time to include the exposition that you included. It was a good read and I certainly look forward to seeing more!

## Devil in the Silence

(Sal Taybrim)

It was cold.

A simple saying, but perhaps cold was an understatement. On a planet where the miners had fifteen different words to describe the precise kind of cold the current weather was displaying, and another seventy-three to cover the specifics of icy precipitation, being able to single out one instance as cold enough to mention lent an air of significance to a simple saying.

The Bakalen were used to cold. The heavy, bipedal bovine creatures adapted well to it, and had been better bred to withstand it for seven generations. Now they stood, stamping their hooves in the frozen ground, refusing to move. When it was cold enough to make them pause, the dilithium mine workers of Seandrus VII knew it was time to call it quits.

“Get them into the barn, and everyone else into the shelters, there’s a good one brewin!” Kleos Tal, the Rigellian foreman called out. The miners took up their tools with an air of relief, herding the animals into their shelters before running for warmth. It was only when the majority of workers and animals alike had been safely stowed that Tal noticed movement on the edge of the mine. “Starfleet, get your [...] back here!”

“McEnroe and Daling are still out there!” The young Terran suited up in insulated Starfleet scientific blues called back. “They might need someone to flare them in!”

“I told them not to go. If those fools wanted to go spelunking for ancient artifacts, they should have picked a clear day when all the scanners were fully operational.” Tal shook his head. “Not that you stuffed shirt Starfleet types ever listen...” he added under his breath. “You’d be better off watching for them on the perimeter scan. I ain’t makin’ the call to Starfleet explaining why your body’s coming back in a freezerbag.”

Lieutenant Michael Evans took a breath in through his teeth. He had been part of the original team to scout the dilithium deposits in this area three years ago; he knew the terrain and the weather as well as Tal knew them, and yet the foreman took every chance possible to make him feel like a chastised child. “Fine, I want control of the camera.”

“All yours.” Kleos Tal smirked, waving the officer towards the cabin. “Hurry up, before your eyeballs freeze.”

~\*~

Evans was pacing. It was either pacing or screaming, but as the minutes dragged by and the sky went from hazy grey towards black, he could feel his panic rising. “Where are they?” he asked into his hand as he bit down on the knuckles.

“Don’t get your panties into a bundle.” Tal remarked, looking up from his coffee. “They probably saw the storm coming and made camp.”

“Which means they could get snowed in.” Evans countered, taking a break from his pacing to stare at the blank feed.

Tal shrugged. “So what if they do? Tomorrow’s the fifteenth. Supply ship’s a comin’ and if we need to, we can scan for ‘em and have ‘em beamed out.”

Evans folded his arms across his chest. He didn’t like it, but Tal had a point. Sinking into the chair facing the camera feed he watched the steam drain off his cup of raktajino. He didn’t know how much energy he had wasted in worrying, but he had almost dozed off in the chair when the communications system crackled to life.

[[Daling to Evans... storm getting wo... coming ... bringing in an injured... following...]]

Evans’ head snapped up, hitting the communications panel. “Ensign Daling? You’re breaking up! Boost your signal.”

There was a burst of static, followed by a high pitched whine, before Daling’s raspy voice came through.

[[Can you hear me, Sir? We’re coming into the complex now. We have one of those cow-beasts they use in the mines; burned real badly from the microwave radiation we used to clear the snow from the cave walls. McEnroe told me to bring it back, she thinks she can help it.]] Daling’s tone clearly hinted that he would have put it out of its misery mercifully in order to be back on time. Evans allowed a small smile to play across his features. Lilly McEnroe was the sort of person who hated to see anyone or anything suffer, from a beast of burden to a fellow crewmate.

“You said you were following something?” He queried, leaning forward as if getting closer to the communication panel would help him be heard.

[[I think we’re being followed. Something has been after us ever since we left the dig site.]]

“Do you know the identity of what’s following you?”

Dailing drew in a breath [[No, Sir. It’s moving tactically. And not on a vehicle. Maybe riding an animal? Hard to tell. McEnroe tried to get a scan, but the weather conditions are interfering.]]

“I have you on the camera feed, and I’m getting partial sensor readings. Looks like whatever was following you has backed off... If I can get a better scan, I will.” Evans paused, looking back at the camera. “Where are you headed?”

[McEnroe wants to head to the barn first, to drop off our passenger. Then we’re heading in. I’m freezing.]

“Be careful.” Evans murmured trying to push away the ill feeling in his gut.

[When am I not careful, boss?] Dailing chuckled.

Evans forced a smile into his voice. “I know, but...” he never had a chance to finish the thought. As the vehicle pulled up towards the barn, a choked cry came over the line, and it lapsed into static. “Daling?”

Nothing.

“McEnroe? Daling?!” A shadow flickered across the screen, heading directly for the snowmobile. “I need to know what that is, now!” Evans shouted at Tal, trying to move the camera in for a closer view. “Get me that audio feed back...”

There was a crackle of static and the terrified scream of Daling’s voice pierced the line. Terror turned to anguish, and anguish turned to pain. The voice was suddenly cut short.

“You said you know every animal on these plains... what was that?” Evans demanded, thrusting a finger towards the viewscreen.

Kleos Tal perked a brow; reaching for the disruptor rifle he kept by his parka. “I have no clue. But I’m gonna find out.”

~\*~

Outside the snow was falling so fast it looked like the whole planet was in the middle of a giant snow globe that was being shaken continuously, never giving anything time to settle. Add to that the fact that with every breath, a haze of fog clung to Evans’ facemask and goggles, the young officer felt like he was blundering around in the dark.

Kleos Tal fanned out with several of his friends – trigger happy mine junkies who didn’t seem to care that one wrong step might get them killed. They were hunting monsters. Evans’ scoffed - he was looking for his teammates. His hands tightened on his phaser as they spread out to search.

Daling was outside the barn, face up in the snow, surrounded by a growing puddle of dark blue. The Bolian’s cracked helmet lay several feet beside him. Evans felt his heart leap up into his throat and he rushed to the fallen man’s side.

He was still warm.

Evans gently prodded Daling’s shoulder, prompting an anguished groan from the smaller man. “We should have never taken that cow-beast.” his voice was whisper thin and broken. “They came back. They got Lilly.”

“Shh. Steady.” Evans counseled, gently fumbling in a desperate attempt to provide first aid. “We’ll get you inside.”

Daling shook his head fractionally. “This is revenge. We fried two of the little beasts on accident, they got scared when they saw us and ran into the cave where we were using microwaves. Crisped them before we could shut it off. The last one lived. I was going to put it out of its misery, but Lilly said we could save it... and now they’re gonna kill her for it.” His voice was raspy and gurgling.

Evans clenched his teeth, watching the man’s chest flutter and collapse. “Shut up, Ensign, I’m gonna get you out of here.” He felt tears form and freeze at the sides of his face. The pool of blood was still

spreading, turning to slick blue ice at the edges as Daling's eyes glazed over. Evans scooped the Bolian into his arms, trying to ignore the man's groan of agony.

"I'm done, Sir. Leave me." Daling pleaded, his voice failing. "Save Lilly... please..." His eyes closed, and the snow flakes stopped melting as they hit his lips.

Evans closed his eyes, feeling cold seep into the young officers' body. For several long seconds his brain screamed in denial, and he started to pick Daling up as the man sank as dead weight into his arms. "Keep breathing, Daling, come on!" He clung to the corpse, as if he could order the man to live. In the end he was shaken from his frozen reverie by a high pitched screech.

Whirling around, he saw what Daling was speaking of. One of the Bakalen stamped the snow with a murderous focus on the snowmobile. On Lilly McEnroe.

Murmuring an apology Evans lay the dead man down and sprinted towards the sled, firing his phaser into the creature's side. His jaw dropped, watching as the weapon didn't even slow it down. The Bakalen gave a high pitched scream of fury and turned to intercept Evans, ramming its head into his chest.

Evans hit the frozen ground hard enough that his vision blurred into bright white spots, and he rolled onto his stomach underneath the ore platform. McEnroe stirred with just enough awareness to jump from the snowmobile before the second attack came. The hammering of hooves crushed the body of the vehicle like a tin can.

"Lilly!" Evans croaked. "Get under the platform!" He waved a hand towards her, but she lay still as the Bakalen kicked the sled out of its way and advanced. He crawled towards the opposite side of the platform, praying under his breath. "No... please no..." There was no way he could make it to McEnroe first, and even if he did, it was only giving the Bakalen a choice of two victims instead of one. A bitter feeling rose in his throat as he heard the thing roar.

A flash of light pierced his vision, and he heard Kleos Tal's crass laughter. A second line of disruptor fire followed and a third, cutting a dark line of blood down the beast's chest. It issued one last guttural growl before it collapsed in a ruined heap. "That was pretty good, huh?" Tal crowed.

Evans felt his adrenaline spike as he pulled himself to his feet, ignoring Tal's commentary. His eyes were on one goal: Lilly. He ran to her, checking quickly to make sure he could move her. As he looked up, he saw movement around Tal's position and the Rigelian started to panic, firing into the darkness. "What got into these crazy beasts? Get back in your pens!"

Evans stood, picking McEnroe up with him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tal down one of the Bakalen as two more converged on him. There was a sickening crack of bones, punctuated by a low growl of revenge.

Mercifully, Tal's screams were drowned out by the hammering of Evans' heart echoing through his head. With McEnroe's bloody form draped across one shoulder, he held his phaser up with his other hand, biting back a laugh at how ineffective the hand weapon seemed against looming monsters. The snow drifted down in a light powdery dust, fading to nothingness as the temperature dropped. They

needed shelter and they needed it now. With the Bakalen between them and the main shelter, it seemed like slim pickings. Evans squinted into the darkness. The barn was enticingly close.

Close, and where the Bakalen lived. It was a double edged sword and he never was much of a gambler. He was about ready to circle back when McEnroe groaned.

“Lilly?” He murmured, trying to shift her so he could see her face.

“Cold... Mike. I’m so cold...” she breathed, her eyes still closed.

Evans’ felt his heart race. “I’ll find shelter, Lilly, don’t worry.”

“Mike... remember Janus 6?” She stammered through a body-wrenching shiver.

“Shh, Lilly... Don’t speak.” He consoled, quickening his pace.

“No, Mike... listen. Remember Janus 6... please!” She implored, her last words fading into incoherency.

Evans furrowed his brow, wondering how long she had if she was hallucinating. He had been to many planets with Lilly McEnroe before, but never Janus 6. It was a geological oddity half a sector away. Why bring it up now?

The Bakalen had disappeared, and his muscles ached from the cold. Swallowing the bile in the back of his throat he kicked the barn door open and slipped inside. Almost immediately he wished he hadn’t.

He could smell the burned flesh of the calf Daling talked about, and as his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he could see the baleful eyes of an adult cow boring into him. Evans brought his phaser to bear, wavering between the calf and the adult. “I don’t want to hurt you,” he offered in a soothing tone.

It paused and looked at him stamping its hoof and making the signal the miners used deep in the mines to tell an operator to stop the cart when you couldn’t hear them.

Stop.

He stopped, staring as the creature stood down, edging around him to stand by the injured calf. Looking at him as if it had something to say. That’s when it hit him like a brick to the head. Janus 6. The Horta. A seemingly murderous beast was actually sentient. “I can help...” he offered with a thread of hope that it might understand

It canted its head like he had seen then do in the mines. He had never thought about what it meant before. Like it was trying to speak. Trying... or perhaps actually speaking... Evans held his hands up in a non threatening manner, fumbling with his tricorder. Scanning for something... anything he could use to communicate.

That’s when he caught it, in the frequencies beyond what most humanoids could hear. A trilling, perhaps a language. “Keep speaking...” he implored.

He struggled to hook his own communicator up into the matrix, letting the devices chug through the input, until a simple message flashed back to him on the screen: [How can murderer help?]

"Murderer?" He swallowed, remembering what Daling said about the dead calves. "We did not know..."

[Never murder innocent, no.]

He shook his head sorrowfully. "We were not innocent, but we did not want to hurt you. She brought that one back to help." He gestured between Lilly and the calf. "You need help." Evans' reasoned, catching the mother's gaze and locking it with his own. "I have medicine. In her pack. You can have it if you let me help."

Dragging a hoof across the stable floor she canted her head, and the message flashed across the screen: [You give, we give.]

Barely daring to breathe, Evans dug in McEnroe's pack, drawing out her med kit and opening it up. "Can you use it?"

[You help son, I warm woman.] It was a plain offer, but one Evans was willing to accept. He knelt down by the bleating calf, applying burn salve and regenerative bandages under the hawk-eye gaze of its mother. When he was finally done he turned back, giving a silent prayer of thanks to see Lilly's chest rise and fall evenly in sleep.

The Bakalen's expression was ponderous, sorrowful. [We did not think you would help. We thought you were all murderers. We did not need to freeze so much blood.]

He offered a slow nod of assent, watching as the mother mirrored it. "I can tell my people to leave you alone."

She settled back on her haunches and for many long minutes no message came over the PADD. Finally she leaned forward and words flashed up. [We need voice. You are voice. Forget this not.]

Evans nodded his head, mutely, letting his eyes meet hers. He had no words to express the amount of apology he wanted to bestow to the Bakalen for this misunderstanding; no way of saying how furious he was – not at them in specific, but that years of ignorant silence between the two species had pushed one to act out in the most vicious and base way possible against the other simply to be heard. And the only thing that would prevent it from happening again was giving them voice.

His voice.

"I am your voice." They were the only words that slipped out as he stared off into the horizon, waiting for the call from the supply ship to come through.

~\*~

The Bakalen were silent as the morning dawned and the call came through from the supply ship. Evans ordered two for transport; he would tell the Captain what had happened once he was warm enough to form the words.

The breath that rattled through his teeth was tainted by the stab of sorrow wrenching his gut. Academically he could trace everything back to where things went wrong. But face to face with the death masques of people he had shared dinner with last night; now decorated with their own frozen entrails as the remains of the shelter smoldered in the tenuous light of dawn, it made Evans feel numb. How many years had the Bakalen tried to tell them they were more than stupid pack animals, for a peaceful species to be finally driven to this kind of murder?

He dropped to his knees in the snow still holding McEnroe in his arms. Surrounded by the carnage of misunderstanding, he closed his eyes and waited for the transporter beam to take him away from this nightmare.

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Judge's Comments Regarding "Devil in the Silence"  
(Judge's Character: Aron Kells)

First, I have to give some immense praise to the phrase "...it looked like the whole planet was in the middle of a giant snow globe that was being shaken continuously, never giving anything time to settle," which neatly describes not only the weather but also the frantic, pitched atmosphere of this story. I would like also to applaud the way in which it's told, as the events unfold solidly with a fine flow; the inflections in the plot (Dailing in the barn, the Bakalens' first words, and so forth) occur at pleasing points and the story feels almost like a very short version of [the hero's journey](#). And while this story works very much on the level of its sentences and lines of dialogue, I was most impressed by its devotion to *Trek's* history: It was a brilliant maneuver for Lilly to mention Janus 6 (which, for those who don't know, is the home of the Horta -- I didn't know, but once I looked it up, I was immensely pleased). However, within that brilliant maneuver is the story's weakest point, as the sentient-life-we-don't-think-is-sentient has been done many times in *Trek*, from the Horta to the crystal life forms of "Home Soil" (who so memorably labeled humanoids "ugly bags of mostly water"), that once that reveal has occurred, the story loses a lot of its momentum. Evans hasn't been developed beyond the hero of the piece, and while he doesn't need to be -- I don't necessarily think this is a character-driven story -- I do need something to keep me going beyond the Bakalens' first words. Or, put another way, just because the revelation-of-sentience storyline has been done before doesn't mean it can't be done again, only that any further use *must* develop the concept beyond the surprise reveal, and that is what I'd like to see in this story. Maybe something to think about for a future story? Regardless, I do hope you'll enter the Challenge again as I am very impressed by your work with story structure and style. I'll leave this review with another of my favorite lines, from the story's beginning: "On a planet where the miners had fifteen different words to describe the precise kind of cold the current weather was displaying, and another seventy-three to cover the specifics of icy precipitation, being able to single out one instance as cold enough to mention lent an air of significance to a simple saying." Well done!

Pray for Favour  
(Diego Herrera)

The phrase 'dead of night' certainly seemed apt. Were it not for the fact that Kellan's young eyes had adjusted to the dark, he felt he could have been sneaking around a crypt. There was a presence in the atmosphere of Valo II that was reminiscent of the underworld somehow, a heavy, oppressive quality to the air that threatened to crush you with every passing minute. There was no hope here. No light.

The young Bajoran scrambled over crumbling walls. The familiar tickle of brick-dust on his lungs brought with it the threat of a telltale cough that could wake one of the tumbledown ruin's inhabitants. This part of the city was nothing more than a slum, filled with people like him. Food was scarce and money even more so. This wasn't his first time sneaking food from here; the ruin's inhabitants were thrifty and resourceful, a gang of street thugs with just enough influence that they were able to gather food as a tithe in addition to whatever else they were able to scavenge or pilfer from forays further into the city. They were known to Kellan, and he was known to them. In fact, their relationship to one another was well defined. They provided him food and, on the frequent occasions when they realised that, they also provided him pain.

It was worth it, though. The clandestine operation always brought with it a chance of success. The truth was, Kellan's hopes lay far from here and he wasn't stealing for himself. The sixteen year-old thief had found someone he cared about in the slums. He had been led to him not by the Prophets, but by his own two feet, and when he'd encountered the old, gaunt beggar and offered him part of the food he had managed to gather during the day, he had suddenly felt and understood the meaning of kindness. In return, the man who he had come to know as Heril had given him quite the unique gift. During the hours they spent together, he taught him incredible things about the stars, about space and about the rules by which the world worked. It wasn't much of a world, but to suddenly find himself beginning to understand it made Kellan hungry for knowledge. He'd had a basic education in the refugee camps but, once they had been broken up, he'd learned little else other than what was necessary to survive on the streets of this excuse for a slum. And so the never ending quest to sate two kinds of hunger had begun.

The camps didn't exist any more. They had been dispersed after the liberation of Bajor. Many of the Bajora had taken their chance to travel home but for some, such things were not possible. Kellan had no family to whom he could return. During his early years in the camps, he could remember being taken care of by a number of different families but inevitably the same thing would always happen and he would be passed along like an unwanted disease thanks to the amount of food a growing boy needed to consume. He was as thin as a rake now, all arms and legs as he had shot upwards but not outwards. His frame was ideal for nights like this, sneaking through exposed segments of foundations, into and out of cavities in walls, or in the narrow spaces between ceilings and floors. Heril's concerns about his health usually fell on deaf ears, not because Kellan wasn't worried himself, but because he couldn't afford to think about it. Fortunately, it was easy to get the old man talking about what lay beyond the bitter world that they lived in. During those times, such things were easily forgotten.

A floorboard creaked. He'd allowed himself to become too distracted and deviated a few inches from his normal path. He knew it was going to cost him and his suspicions were confirmed moments later when his sharp ears picked up three words that made his heart sink: "I'll go check." Immediately, he had to make a decision about whether or not to listen to his instincts, which were all telling him to run, or his stomach, which was telling him he had to stay. Heril had to be hungry, too. It was two days now since Kellan had managed to find anything for them. No-one else would look after the old man; without Kellan he might starve. His feet carried him quickly to a darkened recess despite their will to carry him to the nearest window. With great dread, he realised that there were two sets of footsteps coming towards him and not one.

"It's that whelp again. I'm telling you, he comes here every night."

The room's metal door was unceremoniously heaved to one side by two pairs of hands. Kellan never used it, there were other ways in and out, but none that he could access now without being seen. He held his breath for fear that even that might give him away. To his own ears, it sounded like the men would be able to locate him by the drum beat of his heart. No matter how many times he was caught by them, he could never be quite sure what form their justice would take. Lately they had been getting more and more inventive.

When he saw them start to check recesses where the wall had collapsed, he knew that he was going to have the chance to find out.

At times like this, he could feel parts of his mind starting to shut down. It was a protective response, he realised, one that helped him to cope with the fact that this happened so regularly and that let him maintain his will to keep coming back to the most reliable source of food in the whole area. Rather than cowering until the inevitable moment where he would be caught, he was taken with the overwhelming desire to just get this over with. He stood, and walked out of the shadows where they could see him.

"I knew it! Didn't I tell you it would be that brat?"

The man closed the distance between them in seconds; Kellan took a step back towards the wall and did his best not to flinch. He just had to be brave now, he told himself, although he felt the painful tug of a fist closing tightly around his hair and the unpleasant moisture of spit on his face before he'd fully finished the thought.

"You steal from your own people! You betray the fact you are a Bajoran! You're no better than a Cardassian!"

Kellan could pick up from his captor's tone that a 'Cardassian' was something undesirable but the significance was lost on him. He was sure he had been born here; this was the only world he knew. He'd

only ever known other Bajorans and some humans, a gaudy looking race of people with smooth noses and brightly coloured uniforms. He was speaking before he'd even realised it; his mind had been trained to fill gaps in his knowledge.

"What's one of them?"

Apparently he'd said the wrong thing. The fist tightened around his hair, causing him to cry out briefly before he was silenced by a backhand across the face that was hard enough to make him taste blood.

"You're an insult to your people! You don't know what it means to be a Bajoran!"

There was a heat in his words like nothing Kellan had ever heard. Somehow, he had drawn a primal rage from this man like none he had ever seen before. All concerns of food and knowledge were abandoned and his mental defenses crumbled: he was terrified for his life!

The other man drew alongside him and grabbed his face, rough fingers squeezing Kellan's jaw as he forced his head sideways.

"He doesn't even wear an earring. He probably doesn't know about the Prophets, either."

"Do you?"

The weak nod he gave them was honest, but not so much so as the whimper that accompanied it. He knew enough about the Prophets to know that they didn't care about him. There was no path they wanted him to walk. They had doomed him to this desolate existence to live with barren guts and absent hope. Heril spoke fondly of them, but Kellan could not bring himself to believe in deities that would make such arbitrary condemnations.

"Then pray they will look favourably on you tonight."

The boy's answer was despondent. He knew that his spirit, as well as his body, would take a long time to recover from this night.

"They won't. They never do."

::He was immediately grabbed and dragged through the door. They manhandled him over to the edge of a table, and forced his face down onto it. One of them grabbed his hand and stretched it out over the table's filthy surface, pinning it into place with strength far superior than his. He shook with terror as he caught sight of something metallic and cylindrical as it was raised into the air. Before his sentence was delivered, a voice hissed into his ear, the heat of Bajoran breath making his skin crawl.::

"Then perhaps they will see fit to teach you the lesson that treason against your own people is something we will not tolerate. It will be a long time before you think about stealing from us again."

He screwed his eyes closed as the heavy metal bar sped down towards his fingers...

Judge's Comments Regarding "Pray for Favour"  
(Judge's Character: Toni Turner)

"Pray for Favour" was a study of survival, and a subject that Herrera particularly handles well. I like his in character personalization as it put the piece in a mode that endeared the character to most readers as they, in some way, could identify with his troubles, and the mindset his world had taught him. Things that kept him coming back night after night . . . "human" kindness for his beggar friend, and survival.