

Star Trek: Perseus Son Rise Sun Set

By David Falkayn

PART 1

“Entering planetary system 892.” Lieutenant (jg) Yitzhak Shalev announced from his position at the helm of the USS *Perseus* as the *Intrepid*-class starship glided past a ringed greenish hued gas giant accompanied by three Io sized moons and a dozen smaller companions.

“Any sign of interplanetary travel?” The captain of the *Perseus*, Christopher Hobson, asked as he leaned forward in the center seat.

“No Sir...” The Denobulan science officer, Lieutenant Velen, responded from his position at the science station. “No indication of any sort of interplanetary travel at all—manned or unmanned. No satellites in orbit around the planet either.”

“Communications signals?” Hobson inquired.

“None directed towards space in what would appear to be any sort of SETI or radio astronomy program, Sir.” Lieutenant T’Pren reported from the tactical security station, “There’s some signal bleed from the planet, but it’s mostly radio in the AM band. Some FM...some of what looks like it might be television.”

“Assume standard orbit, then, Mr. Shalev.” As the former Border Services officer and current senior helmsman from Eretz Israel smoothly slipped the vessel in orbit around the blue white globe, Hobson pressed the intercom button on his chair arm, “Continue orbital scans and senior officers will meet in Conference Room Three in one standard hour.” Getting up from his chair, he flashed a slight smile at the Deltan woman sitting next to him, “Commander Rysyl...the bridge is yours.”

Entering the turbolift, Captain Hobson ordered, “Deck Three.” Taking advantage of the opportunity for reflection, the brown haired starship

commander's thoughts went back to two months ago, when the orders for both his promotion and assignment to his new command came in.

"Congratulations, Captain." Captain Elizabeth Shelby grinned as she came out from around her desk. Taking her soon to be former first officer's hand and shaking it, the blonde haired captain of the *Sutherland* praised, *"You've more than earned that fourth pip, Chris. I'm only sorry that it took so long for Starfleet Command to figure that out."* Her smile broadening, Liz remarked, *"The Perseus is a fine ship and a great first command. I assume that you'll want Mr. Rysyl as your first officer? I think she's ready to take the next step, and I'm sure she'll serve you as well as you have me; but, of course, if you have someone else in mind..."* Shelby smirked, knowing that her former first officer was quite sure that he wanted the Deltan as his XO, *"...that would be your prerogative. The decision's yours."*

"My first command decision?" The newly minted captain joked, his lips turning up into a slight grin.

"You might say that." Shelby quipped, her grin growing wider. *"Still...it's an important one. You'll want someone who can balance your weaknesses with their strengths, and I think Anara does that for you—just like you did for me."* Her smile vanishing, the experienced captain further recommended, *"The warp nacelles on the Intrepids are as sensitive as a man's...well...you know what I mean."* Liz paused, *"...I don't have to tell you how delicate they are and I'm sure you're also up to date on the new swirl-mix engine core they use—you should make sure that you've got a crackerjack chief engineer. And no...you can't have Jadon—he's all mine. So...any thoughts?"*

"Actually, Captain..." Chris replied, *"I do have someone in mind..."*

Tapping her toes to the early 23rd century techno-pop dance tune currently playing in the Intrepid-class ship's engine room, Lieutenant Angela 'Treasure' Barrows flashed a broad grin as she surveyed her new domain. "Keep an eye on the mix ratio, Deneel!" She called out to the young Bolian ensign monitoring the matter-anti-matter flow from his console. Walking over to his station, her smile grew wider, "These babies aren't like the old matter—anti-matter reactors ya'll practiced on at the Academy. Those ol' things, you can push and abuse 'til the cows come home and they won't complain. They just

keep on truckin'. But not these babies..." The Northstar native explained in the thick Texas accent characteristic of that human colony, "You gotta be nice to 'em. They're like Catullan racers—fast and powerful, but very...very touchy. If you don't treat 'em right, they'll frinx you over when you need 'em most—like right in the middle of a battle, and ya'll don't want that, do you? "

"Yes, Sir...I mean, No, Sir...I mean..." The young ensign, fresh out of the Academy and eager to please, answered back quickly, "I'll be more careful in the future."

"Relax, Sugar." The chief engineer replied her smile growing wider as she saw the worried look on the Bolian youth's face, "Ya'll didn't do anything wrong! You just gotta remember to keep an eye on what you're doing—especially when things are nice and quiet like they are now."

Turning away from the Bolian ensign, the lieutenant's comm badge chirped, followed immediately by the Vulcan security chief's voice. "Treasure?"

"Yeah, T'Pren?" Lieutenant Barrows replied, responding to the nickname given to her years ago back on the Sutherland.

"The captain wants the senior staff to meet in Conference Room Three in an hour."

"Thanks..." The chief engineer responded, "I'll be there." Turning to her assistant, Angela smirked, "Ya'll heard the lady. We got an hour. Knowing the captain, he's gonna wanna put us through our paces and I don't intend for us to be caught with our pants down. So, let's get to it."

The door to his quarters sliding shut behind him, Captain Hobson eyes flashed briefly on the made up double bed that he shared with his first officer this morning before settling on the replicated oak bookshelf that stood against one of the bedroom walls. Walking over to the shelf, Chris took out a green leather bound volume with the title, "The Collected Works of Seneca", in gold on the spine. Turning it to a page already marked, Hobson read: *"the inhabited world... in huge conflagration it will burn and scorch and burn all mortal things... stars will clash with stars and all the fiery matter of the world... will blaze up in a common conflagration. Then the souls of the Blessed, who have partaken of immortality, when it will seem best for god to create the universe anew... will be changed again into our former elements. Happy,*

Marcia, is your son who knows these mysteries!"

"I wonder..." Hobson muttered to himself as he carefully placed the book back in the exact same spot from which he had taken it earlier. "...if Seneca was truly right here. Maybe Marcia's son would be better off not knowing some mysteries."

"Odd..." Lieutenant Velen noted, "According to Captain Kirk's logs, the 'Romans' who controlled 892-IV possessed a technology equivalent to mid-20th century Earth with television widely available. It would appear that they haven't advanced at all in over a hundred years—if anything, it seems they've regressed somewhat. I'm surprised—I would have thought they'd have at least later 21st century level interplanetary flight by now."

A thoughtful frown on his face, Hobson replied, his patrician tone adding a professorial authority to his words, "It's not really that much of a surprise, Lieutenant, if you think about it for a moment. Remember, the Preservers had seeded 892-IV approximately two thousand Earth years before Captain Kirk encountered them and they'd only advanced to a mid-twentieth century level of technology when the Enterprise arrived in the system. Ancient Roman society on Earth ..." the amateur historian lectured, warming up to the topic at hand, "...especially during the Empire, was actually very conservative and highly suspicious about anything new. So...it would be logical to assume the same about these Romans."

"That makes sense." Lieutenant Commander Devon Miller, the Perseus's operations officer said, speaking from his post. "Also, with slave labor being quite common—institutionalized to the point of slaves possessing benefits including old age and disability pensions, in fact—the incentive to innovate wouldn't be that great."

"Exactly." Chris affirmed, nodding his head approvingly at the dark skinned Dominion War veteran. "I'll also wager that there'll be no evidence of nuclear power in use either. Remember..." the captain pointed out, "...that the splitting of the atom and the development of nuclear fission took place directly as result of the Second World War and that the use of nuclear power as an energy source, not to mention the development of nuclear fusion, was a product of the Cold War. A stable Empire without any serious external threats would have no need to take that route."

"Well, Sir..." Lieutenant Velen responded, his lips turning up into the wide grin characteristic of his species, "That's a bet you'd have won. I've detected no sign of the use of nuclear fission—much less fusion. No sign of solar power either—although there does appear to be use of hydroelectric power as well as extensive use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil and some natural gas." Pausing for a moment, the Denobulan science officer commented, "Also, our scans picked up what appears to be fairly large troop concentrations near certain cities and along certain geographical features."

"Mr. T'Pren..." Captain Hobson interjected, "Can you put those deployments up on a tactical map?"

"Aye, Sir." The Vulcan security chief replied. Moments later, a holographic tactical display of Magna Roma appeared above the conference table. The cities appeared as glowing yellow dots of varying size and brightness. Rectangular shapes then appeared: some surrounding or near some of the dots, while others occupied other positions on the map.

"Those formations near the cities..." T'Pren noted, "...could be there to put down urban revolts. The others, however, seem to be positioned to carry out an invasion of this territory." The Vulcan concluded, the area threatened now highlighted in red.

"Could be a prelude to civil war." Hobson speculated, drumming his fingers on the table before him. "On Earth, they were endemic throughout periods of the Empire's history."

"I wonder..." Anara proposed, "...whether it might have anything to do with this 'Son worship' that the *Enterprise* cultural anthropologists concluded was a local variant of Christianity."

"Possible." Chris conceded, sparing the lovely Deltan first officer a subtle smile, "Depending on conditions on the ground, this troop build up could be the prelude to a persecution."

"Perhaps..." The lovely Deltan first officer seated next to the captain remarked, "...we could pick up some information from their newscasts." Addressing the Vulcan security officer, Commander Rysyl asked, "Are you getting any transmissions like that, Mr. T'Pren?"

"Aye, Commander." T'Pren replied. "I'm picking up something that sounds like it might be a news program."

"Put it on the monitor." Captain Hobson ordered as he leaned forward in his seat. Lines of static quickly resolved themselves into the image of a man wearing what appeared to be a twentieth century business suit seated behind a desk looking into the camera.

"This is Lucius Manlius and you are watching Veritas, the news program the Empire does not want you to see."

"A pirate broadcast?" Miller speculated, stroking his chin.

"Probably." Hobson replied thoughtfully, "Let's watch."

"And now for our lead story: Negotiations have broken down after the third day of talks between representatives of the Empire and leaders of the breakaway province of Nova Libertas." The image on the screen was of two men and a woman walking out of a conference room, the woman walking in the middle of the two men as they strode single file, their heads held high, through the opened door. At the conference table, one man sat on an elevated chair on the opposite side from three empty chairs, with two other men on smaller chairs seated to either side of him. "We can thank a courageous citizen-journalist, along with his cameraman, both of whom succeeded in posing as members of the Imperial Broadcasting Corporation, for these pictures of Proconsul Elabrius sitting on his throne surrounded by his functionaries. Those same citizen-journalists were also responsible for the following interview with the rebel spokeswoman, Valeria Tiberia, conducted a few hours later in her secure retreat.

"Thank you for the interview, Donna Tiberia."

"You're welcome!" The chestnut haired woman responded with a smile, "And please, call me Valeria, not 'Donna'. I'm not a stuck up Roman matron. I don't go by any titles. My great-grandmother was a slave and I'm just a regular person like you." Her lips turning up into a grin, the charismatic woman asked, "So...what's your first question?"

"Thank you, Valeria. Can you tell us what caused the negotiations to break down?"

"Yes." The attractive woman replied, her smile vanishing, "The Proconsul's refusal to take our demands seriously."

"And what demands are those?" The reporter asked.

"Besides the right to worship as we choose..." The rebel spokeswoman responded, *"I'd like to read this, the preamble of our Declaration of Principles, it'll give you the gist of what we seek: "We the people of Nova Libertas determined that our posterity shall be free of war and strife, and to reaffirm faith in the fundamental rights of all humans, in each person's intrinsic dignity and worth, in the equal rights of all regardless of class or gender, seek the right to elect our own governors and senators, to travel freely, to engage in whatever occupation we choose, to have a free and open press, to possess the right to freely assemble..."* Pausing for a moment, the chestnut haired woman concluded, *"...and last...but certainly not least...we demand the abolition all forms of slavery within our territory."*

"And if the Proconsul continues to refuse your demands?"

Her smile now replaced by a look of steely determination, the chestnut haired woman answered back, *"The Empire must realize that the old days and the old ways belong in the past. Thanks to those who came to us long ago and from whom some of us are descended, we know that there is another way—a better way—and we will not settle for less. If the Empire refuses to listen to us, we shall secede declare ourselves an independent state using the Declaration as the basis for our new society."*

As the senior staff of the *Perseus* listened quietly, Lieutenant Barrows spoke in a low voice, "What she was just reading sounded an awful lot like the Federation Charter."

"The preamble to be precise." Captain Hobson concurred. Stroking his chin thoughtfully, he remarked in his usual patrician tone, "Did you also catch what she said about 'those who came to us long ago...'"

"...and from whom some of us are descended..." Anara interjected, completing the captain's recitation. It appears that between the *Beagle* and Captain Kirk and his people, a lot more was left behind than was thought."

"Kirk did point out in his log that Captain Merrick told him that not all of his crew were killed—that some had adapted to life on the planet's surface." Lieutenant Shalev pointed out.

"It would make sense that they would have descendants." Lieutenant Velen added, "And that...even subconsciously...that they might pass on some of their

heritage to their children.”

“Regardless of its cause...” Chris announced, “It looks like we have an incident of cultural contamination here. We need to find out just how serious and far-reaching the contamination is without making it worse.”

“While we’ll be able to do quite a bit from orbit...” Anara remarked carefully, “...we’ll need to make closer observations.”

“A landing party...” Lieutenant Commander Miller argued, “...might make things even worse.”

“You make a good point, Mr. Miller...” Hobson declared, having already made his decision, “...but I think Commander Rysyl is right. We’re going to need boots on the ground here. Landing party will consist of the following: Myself...”

“Sir?” The Deltan first officer interjected, “I must protest. The risks...”

“I know, Commander...” Chris interrupted, holding his hand up, “And under most circumstances I would agree with you, but in this instance, I believe that it is necessary that I lead the party. I am probably the only person here who can be described as a classicist, and I’m also almost certainly the only member of this ship who is grammatically fluent in Latin.” Ignoring the withering glare his first officer/lover was giving him, the captain continued, “Second...” he said, smirking inwardly as he anticipated his paramour’s reaction to his next statement, “...Commander Rysyl...”

“Sir?” The dark-skinned operations officer interjected, “You and the first officer both planetside? It’s bad enough you’re going down, Captain, but taking Commander Rysyl as well...”

“I’ll need her empathic abilities. Also...as something of an art historian, she might be able to contribute certain insights that might otherwise go unseen.” Hobson explained adding, knowing that his next words would entice the ambitious second officer to drop his objections, “You’ll be in temporary command of the ship, Mr. Miller.”

“Aye, Sir.” The Dominion War veteran responded, rising at once to Hobson’s lure.

“Mr. T’Pren...” Chris inquired, addressing his tactical officer, “I’ll need you as

well. You and Commander Rysyl will report to Dr. Nor for cosmetic surgery. After all..." He quipped, his lips turning up into the slightest of smiles, "We can't have you looking like 'barbarians.'"

"Aye, Sir." Both women responded, clenching their teeth slightly at the prospect of having their appearance altered to appear more human.

"Finally..." Hobson declared, turning to the ship's helmsman, "Mr. Shalev...you'll complete the landing party. You'll need more experience in handling these sorts of situations than you would have gotten in the Border Service if you hope you advance any further in the command track."

"Yes, Sir." The dark haired helmsman enthusiastically responded.

"One other thing..." Hobson instructed, clearing his throat, "Treasure? Can you duplicate what the *Enterprise* engineer did to the 'Roman' power grid if necessary?"

"Not a problem at all, Sir." The engineer answered back with a toothy grin. "Anything that ol' *Connie* can do—we can do better."

"Excellent." The fastidious captain exclaimed as he stood up. "If there are no more questions, then the landing party will meet in Transporter Room One in one hour. Lieutenant T'Pren? Make sure that we have clothing that would fit in with the planet's inhabitants—as non-descript as possible if you'd please."

As the gathering began to disperse, Anara approached the chestnut-haired captain, "Chris?" She asked in a low voice as the door slid shut behind the last of the officers, "Do you have a moment?"

"Certainly, my dear." Hobson replied with a smile on his face as he regarded the olive skinned woman before him. "What is it?"

"It's the composition of the landing party." The Deltan first officer tentatively began, "I didn't want to bring the subject up in front of the others..."

"And I appreciate that." Chris interjected, his eyes reflecting the sincerity that he felt while his face still maintained its usual flat expression. "So, what's the problem..." his lips turning up into a slight grin, he added, "...as if I don't already know."

"It's well..." Anara stammered, "...I need to know one thing...and please,

Chris...tell me the truth..."

"As if I could lie to you..." Hobson quipped, then, seeing the grave expression on his lover's face, he amended in a much more serious tone, "You know I'll tell you the truth—whether you want to hear it or not."

"Fair enough." Anara replied, her lips turning up into a slender smile as she looked up into Hobson's face, "Why are you leading this landing party? Are you trying to protect me?" Her smile vanishing, the empath warned, "Because if you are..."

"I promise you, that's not the reason." Chris immediately stated. Her empathic senses readily picking up on the sincerity of her paramour's feelings, Anara nodded her head in satisfaction as he further explained his reasoning. "Part of the reason is what I told everyone at the briefing—I am the only one on this crew who is fluent in Latin. But..." he smiled, "...as you already know from the look you gave me at the briefing, that's not the only reason."

"Go on..." His first officer encouraged as, walking to the replicator, she fetched glasses of water for her and her captain, "I'm listening."

"The other reason..." Hobson explained, his face revealing an almost boyish enthusiasm that few—other than the woman standing before him—ever got the chance to see, "...is because I'm genuinely curious to see this society and to see for myself how profound the cultural contamination resulting from both the Beagle and Enterprise. And the only way I can do that is to be there on the ground to see it and experience it for myself."

Chuckling, the lovely olive skinned Deltan woman reached up on tiptoes to gently kiss Hobson on the lips, "You really are an explorer behind that icy mask, aren't you, Chris?"

"Sssshhhhh..." Hobson whispered as he returned his lover's kiss, "Keep that to yourself, Dear. We don't want the others to know, now do we? After all, I've got an image to protect."

"Don't worry, my Captain Iceman." Anara teased, "Your secret's safe with me."

"And if the Proconsul continues to refuse your demands?"

Her smile now replaced by a look of steely determination, the chestnut haired woman answered back, *"Then we shall secede from the Empire and declare ourselves an independent state using the Declaration as the basis for our new society."*

Proconsul Marcus Vipsanius Elabrius, rising from his luxurious chair, stomped angrily towards the large 27 inch screen mahogany wood console television set that sat as the center piece of his villa's living room. Turning off the set, he turned towards a man seated on a plush couch at right angles to the Proconsul's chair. "I thought you told me, Aedile Drusus, that your people were close to shutting that station down."

"We thought we were." The aedile responded obsequiously, "But every time our detection units triangulate on their position, they shut down before we can move against them."

"What about jamming their signal?" Proconsul Elabrius demanded, not willing to let his underling off the hook quite yet.

"They keep changing their broadcasting frequency, Proconsul." The cringing official replied, "Or they cease broadcasting temporarily and flood the area with mimeographed broadsheets."

"We could simply arrest her and her people." Another figure, this one wearing a beige tunic and black trousers, with a gold badge embossed with the fasces of the Imperial police on his chest above the heart, suggested. "My people are ready to move whenever you give the word, Proconsul."

"Not yet." Elabrius demurred, shaking his head, "Not before Legate Pompey has his troops in position. Then, once he's ready..." he declared, his lips turning up in an evil grin, "...we strike. And when we are done, that mongrel descendant of a slave and all her supporters—and the barbarian heresies they espouse—will be removed once and for all from the Empire." His eyes taking on a steely cast, the proconsul solemnly vowed, "This I swear."

"I thought that went rather well." A tall well-built man remarked as he entered the room. Sitting at the table across from the rebel spokeswoman, he ran a hand through an unruly mop of sandy-blond hair. "People all over saw and heard that interview. The Proconsul has to negotiate!"

Shaking her head, Valeria Tiberia spoke in a somber tone, “I wish I had your optimism, Bradleius.” Her eyes falling on the yellow armband on her friend’s sleeve emblazoned with a blue ‘B’ in the middle as she fingered first the pendant hanging from a bronze chain around her neck engraved with the image of a human face surrounded by a sunburst, and then the bracelet around her right wrist, engraved with the image of a broken chain, she pointed out, “As long as we have to wear those things...as far as most of the people outside Nova Libertas are concerned I’m nothing more than a freedwoman and a Son worshiper and you’re nothing more than the descendant of barbarians.”

“And if the Proconsul ever discovers the truth about you and who your great-grandfather was...” another voice, this one belonging to a slightly built, petite, olive skinned woman with short curly black hair also bearing a ‘B’ device, this one in the form of a pendant, declared, “...you’d be worse shape than us.” Bearing a pitcher in her hands, the young woman poured wine into three goblets before handing two of the full glasses to the others in the room. Taking the last glass for herself, she asserted in a grim tone, “The Proconsul is not going to negotiate.”

With a snort, Bradleius responded, “Another one of your ancestor’s gifts, Rysyla?”

“If you want to call it that.” Rysyla retorted. Turning back towards Valeria, the olive skinned woman cautioned, “Proconsul Elabrius has no intention of compromising. His mind is made up. He is merely waiting for the proper conditions to strike. And...” she warned as she took another sip of her wine, “...he believes that he will have those conditions soon—very soon.”

“Then we should be prepared.” Valeria responded as, drinking down the last of her wine, she stood up. “Alert the others. I want us ready to move at a moment’s notice. I was hoping we could settle this peacefully, but if it’s a confrontation Elabrius wants...” she declared, her eyes taking on fiery cast, “...then it’s a confrontation he shall have. And may the Son have mercy on us all.”

Smirking as she glanced in the direction of the Deltan first officer, her normally bald pate now covered by luxuriously fine jet-black hair, Lieutenant T’Pren quipped, “Look at it this way Commander—at least you’re not a blonde.”

“Hey!” A voice from the sickbay office called out, “No blonde jokes in here!” Exiting her office, Dr. Helen Nor protested with upward turned lips, brushing aside a stray golden lock from her slightly ridged forehead. Giving Anara a quick visual onceover, the Perseus’s human-Kataran CMO nodded her head approvingly, “Not bad—if I do say so, myself.”

“This is reversible...isn’t it?” A somewhat dubious Anara inquired with a frown as she examined the doctor’s handiwork through a mirror, “You’ll be able to get rid of this...fur...” she asked, blanching in distaste at the full mane of black hair on her head, “...and I won’t have to worry about it growing back...right?”

“Don’t worry, Sir.” Dr. Nor replied in a placating voice, “When you return, I’ll just turn off the genetic markers stimulating follicle growth that I turned on earlier and you’ll be back to your usual self.”

“Good. This stuff itches!” The Deltan woman remarked as she scratched her scalp, her lips then turning up into a smug grin of her own as she heard the doctor’s next words of impending doom—these aimed at the Vulcan woman.

“And now, it’s your turn Lieutenant. Just hop up on this table here.” The doctor ordered, patting the examination table next to where Anara sat, “And I’ll get started on bobbing your ears.” Seeing the panic stricken look overcoming the emotional Vulcan’s face, Helen chuckled, “Don’t worry, T’Pren...I’ll put ‘em back the way they were when you get back.”

“You heard the Doctor.” Anara grinned as she hopped off her table. “See you in Transporter Room One when you’re done.”

“Master?” A dark haired woman wearing a silver chain necklace called out deferentially as she entered the Proconsul’s luxuriantly furnished spacious office. “Legate Pompey is here...”

“Excellent!” Elabrius exclaimed from his desk, “Send him in Livinia and cancel all the rest of my appointments and hold all my calls until further notice.”

“Yes, Sire.” The beautiful receptionist-slave acknowledged as she left the office only to return moments later followed by a burly man wearing a brown uniform with red trim, his epaulets bearing the oak leafs and three stars of an

Imperial Legate.

“Legate Pompey!” Proconsul Elabrius greeted as, stepping out from behind his desk, he rendered the Imperial salute, “Hail Caesar!”

“Hail Caesar!” The Legate crisply responded, his eyes briefly falling on the slave woman standing, head bowed, to the side.

“You may go now, Livinia.” Elabrius commanded. Flashing a leer as the young woman walked away, the proconsul remarked, “Pretty, isn’t she? I bought her at the last auction—family had the bad luck to fall into financial difficulties...” Returning to his seat, the proconsul motioned to an empty chair on the other side of the desk. “Is everything in readiness, Legate?”

“Very nearly, Proconsul.” The legate responded confidently. “The last of our units have completed their deployment and our security forces have the locations of the rebel caches. We can move anytime you’re ready.”

“Then...” Proconsul Elabrius smiled, “...we move at dawn. I want Valeria Tiberia and her gang of rebels brought to me in chains.”

Standing up, Legate Pompey saluted, “Then that is what you shall have, Proconsul. Hail Caesar!”

Restraining the impulse to smile as he saw his now raven haired first officer and security officer with human looking ears, Captain Hobson tugged at the loose fitting brown shirt he wore. “Polyester?” He remarked, a look of distaste on his face as he glanced down at the matching pants and shoes.

“You specifically instructed that we were to look nondescript, Sir.” Lieutenant T’Pren reminded, a ghost of a smile on her lips. “This is standard clothing for free proles. Also...” she added as she slipped her hand phaser in its holster at the small of her back, “...they’re loose enough of a fit where we can easily conceal our weapons and instruments.”

“Point made.” Hobson replied as he addressed the ship’s surgeon, “The subcutaneous transponders please, Dr. Nor?” Turning to his second officer, he instructed, “Mr. Miller...if a twenty four period should lapse without one of us checking in with you, you are to immediately beam us up using the transponder signals. Finally...” Chris instructed with his usual poker face,

“...under no...I emphasize—no—circumstances are you to beam down any further landing parties. If something should happen to us, then you are to take command of this vessel and return to Starbase 23. Understood?”

“Aye, Sir.” Miller promptly responded.

“Very good.” Hobson replied as he and the rest of his landing party took their position on the transporter pad, “Energize.”

PART 2

Materializing in an alleyway between two buildings, the landing party quickly crouched as they heard the staccato of automatic weapons fire followed by a scream and then sobs. Then after a momentary pause, the retort of a pistol shot, followed by another rang out. After that, a barked order and the sound of boots crunching down on gravel fading rapidly away.

Catching T'Pren's eye, Hobson gestured for the Vulcan security chief to cover the left flank around the building, while he did the same on the right. Signaling for Shalev to accompany T'Pren, Chris nodded his head at Anara, indicating silently to the Deltan woman to follow him. Each team moved silently and cautiously as they rounded the corner of the large single story structure, keeping to the shadows until, finally reaching the opposite corner, Hobson warily peered around the edge. As his eyes took in the tableau before him, it was all the normally stoic captain could do to maintain his expressionless demeanor. What appeared to be a family: father, mother, and daughter, mother and daughter still in each other's arms, lay sprawled on the ground, their blood already pooling around where they lay. Turning back towards Anara, he shook his head as he tapped his comm badge. "Do you see it?"

"Yes, Sir." The young Vulcan answered back with an angry bite to her voice.

"Have Shalev maintain position and meet me at the sight." Hobson ordered as he turned to his first officer, "Hold position here for now, Anara. I don't want to risk being surprised by whoever did this."

"Understood, Chris." The sensitive Deltan replied, her voice tinged with sadness as she saw the bodies lying motionless on the ground.

"I saw sights like this all the time during the Dominion War..." Lieutenant T'Pren remarked, her voice barely above a whisper as she knelt down next to where the woman and little girl lay, the mother still holding the little girl in her arms. "...but I don't think I'll ever get used to it." Spotting a metallic glint coming from around the woman's neck, the young Vulcan bent down closer. Discovering a copper medallion hanging from a slender gold chain, T'Pren carefully removed the medallion from around the woman's neck. "Captain? What do you think of this?" She asked as she presented the object to Captain Hobson.

“Interesting.” Hobson commented as he noted the faint image of a man’s face surrounded by what appeared to be a halo with rays emanating outward. Examining the other bodies, the two Starfleet officers saw that they also wore the same medallion around their necks. “I would say that this family were Son worshippers.”

“Hmmm...that would make sense.” T’Pren agreed as Hobson signaled Anara and Shalev to join them. “The halo and rays would fit in with the sun imagery while the man’s face...”

“Would serve as an abstract image of Christ.” Hobson said, completing his security officer’s thoughts. Carefully replacing the medallion around the woman’s neck, Chris first closed her eyes, and then those of the little girl and her father. Standing up, the normally punctilious captain remarked, his voice taking on an especially icy tone, “We need to move, we’re too exposed here.”

Her eyes scanning the area, Anara jerked her head towards what appeared to be an abandoned shack, “What about there? It appears to be unoccupied.”

“It’ll do.” Hobson agreed as he signaled his team to follow. “Remember keep low and keep to the shadows. I don’t want any incidents until we get a better read on the situation.”

Entering the abandoned shack, Hobson immediately pointed to T’Pren’s tricorder as Anara and Shalev took covering positions beneath two windows, their glass shattered by what appeared to be rocks and bullets. Nodding her head at her captain’s unspoken command, the Vulcan security officer took out her tricorder. Ensuring that it was set for silent operation, she quickly took her readings. Pointing wordlessly at the floor, the security officer then held up four fingers.

Nodding his head, Hobson signaled the olive skinned Vulcan to move towards the center of the readings. Answering back with a single nod of her head, T’Pren crept silently towards the center of the room from the left as Chris did the same from the right. Meeting in the middle, the Vulcan flashed a quick triumphant grin as her fingers discovered a small groove in the floor. Feeling around, the captain found a similar groove on his side. Motioning for Anara to take a covering position, Hobson raising three fingers counted down. Then, upon reaching zero, he and T’Pren flung open the concealed door, shining

their lights down into the concealed cellar as they simultaneously aimed their phasers.

"No one move!" Hobson ordered as his and T'Pren's lights played upon four huddled sobbing figures—two women, a teenage girl, and what appeared to be a toddler.

"Don't hurt us!" One of the women cried out, "We have children!"

"Don't worry." Chris replied in a calm, reassuring voice, "No one is going to hurt you." Holstering his phaser, the captain held both of his hands out. "See...I'm not carrying any weapons." Moving slowly down the stairs, taking them one step at a time so as to not frighten the huddled sobbing figures more than they already were, Hobson slowly approached the older woman, her aged watery eyes revealing their distrust for the intruder. "We're just like you. We're trying to escape what's happening outside." The captain said, partly telling the truth." Observing through the dancing flashlight beams cuts and bruises on all four of the bolt hole occupants, Chris offered in a deliberately low tone, "We have medical supplies and food...we'll be happy to share if you want."

"Thank you." The other woman, apparently in her thirties, responded as she wiped the tears from her eyes. "When we heard them coming we ran here as fast as we could. We've got a food and water stored down here and some medical supplies, but they came before we could stock up and...well...Julia hurt her arm getting away from a patrol..." she said, tilting her head towards the teenage girl, a dirty and bloody bandage tied around her arm, "...and Margaret" she said, her eyes falling on the toddler, "...she got hurt when I stumbled going down the stairs..."

"Anara...Yitzhak?" Chris called out softly, gesturing with his hand for his Deltan first officer to approach. Turning back to the woman he was talking to, Hobson explained, "My friends, Anara and Yitzhak are coming down with some food and a first aid kit." Flashing a comforting grin, the normally stoic captain added, "The food might not taste very good, but it'll keep your strength up."

"Hello..." Commander Rysyl smiled warmly as she carefully approached the wary teenager. Absorbing the young woman's pain and anxiety, the Deltan first officer projected an aura of compassion as she knelt down next to the girl. "Julia...right?" Anara asked gently as she opened the medkit, receiving in return an answering nod in return. "This will help ease the pain." She

explained as, holding the hypospray to the Julia's neck she injected her. Turning her attention back to her captain, Commander Rysyl reported, "I've injected her with a pain-killer and mild sedative. Once she's asleep, I'll use the dermal regenerator."

"Thank you." Chris replied as he took several packets of emergency rations from Lieutenant Shalev. Handing the packets to the woman he was speaking to earlier, Hobson explained, "These are field rations. As I said, they're not the most appetizing..."

"They'll do just fine." The woman replied as she handed one of the packets to the old woman. Ripping open another packet, the woman bit into the contents. "This might taste horrible." She exclaimed, making a face, "But when you haven't had anything to eat for a while, it's a feast fit for the Imperial Court." Watching as Anara administered first aid while the women ate, Hobson once again gave the woman a reassuring smile, "Can I ask your name?"

"I'm. Camilla." The woman replied, "And this..." she said, jerking her head towards the elderly woman, is my mother, Antonia."

"Well, Camilla..." Chris smiled, "I need to ask you a few questions...all right?"

Nodding her head, the woman replied, "Go ahead...ask."

"First..." Hobson queried, "...when did all this begin?"

"The attacks?" The woman questioned, continuing as the chestnut haired man gently interrogating her nodded his head in affirmation, "They began a couple of hours ago. We were sleeping..." she explained, her eyes moistening, and we heard explosions and then the sound of trucks and *testudos*..."

"*Testudos*?"

"You must be from one of the island provinces..." Camilla chuckled, her laughter possessing a near hysterical quality, "...to not know about testudos. They're the armored cars used by the legions to crush riots and rebellions."

"I see..." Hobson replied, "Go on..."

"My husband...Marcus...he's a follower of the Son, just like us...but he's also one of the Children of Flavius..."

“Who are the Children of Flavius?” Anara interjected.

“They’re named for the legendary gladiator Flavius Maximus who was also a Son worshipper. The Children of Flavius are part of the followers of the New Covenant...like us. We believe that the Son will return one day in triumph and deliver all those pledged to His name. Many Son worshippers are committed to nonviolence.” The sobbing woman explained, “But the Children of Flavius believe that, because it is written in the New Covenant that the Son will return as a conqueror and judge, that it is not only permissible, but expected, for children of the Son to resist injustice through violence.”

“Interesting...” Hobson replied, “I’d like to come back to this New Covenant later, if that’s all right with you, but for now, I’d like you to tell me what happened to you earlier...”

“Of course.” Camilla responded, daubing her eyes with a handkerchief. “My husband woke us all up and told us to get dressed quickly. The soldiers then came towards our house. My husband and oldest son told us to go out the back door...that they would hold the soldiers long enough for us to get away and then join us at the safe house. We ran...and then we heard shooting...and more shooting...and we ran faster. That’s when Julia fell and cut herself. We managed to stay away from any more patrols and made it here and then just a few minutes after we got here...you appeared.”

“Thank you.” Chris replied and then requested, “You wouldn’t happen to have a radio here by any chance wouldn’t you?”

“Yes.” The woman answered back. Standing up, she went to a clothes hamper. Opening the hamper, she took an object out. Returning, she handed the brown haired starship captain a small transistor radio. “The batteries are fresh.” She declared and then warned, “But keep the volume down...if we’re heard...”

“I understand.” Hobson responded, nodding his head. Switching the radio on, he adjusted the tuner until acquiring a signal. Crackling with static, the captain and his first officer, along with their host, leaned in close to listen to transmission.

“Stay off the streets. The legions and lictors have gone mad. They’re shooting men out of hand...and as for the women...better not to say. Children of Flavius are ordered to report to their cell leaders if able. This station will transmit whenever possible, but we cannot stay on the air long. Valeria Tiberia is safe

and encourages all to have faith—we will prevail. Libertas!"

"Valeria Tiberia? Wasn't she the woman we saw earlier...on the news feed." Lieutenant Shalev exclaimed.

"Valeria Tiberia is a true patriot." Camilla declared as the elderly woman, silent until now, huffed angrily.

"Valeria Tiberia is a deceiver. She fills the people with false hope. The Empire is too strong..." The old woman lamented, "In the end, as always, it will win. The only way to survive is to submit."

"Mother!" Camilla reproached, but before she could say anything more, T'Pren whispered from the top of the stairs, "Troops coming our way!"

"Get down here and close the trap door." Hobson immediately ordered as he and his landing party drew their phasers.

Closing the trap door behind her, the Vulcan security officer hid in the shadows at the base of the stairwell on the left while Lieutenant Shalev took the position on the right. Motioning for Anara to take the women to the back of the tiny sanctuary, Hobson crouched behind the clothes hamper where he had a good field of view of the stairway. Hearing the sound of boots on the floor, the captain made a gentle downward motion with the palm of his hand, signaling for the others to stay low and quiet.

"I tell you I saw something move in here!" A disembodied voice coming from the other side of the door adamantly contended.

"And I'm telling you to shut your mouth!" Another, gruffer, voice barked back. "All right...since we're here, we might as well go ahead and see if there's anything of value in here that hasn't already been taken. Look in the back room, Ahenobarbus. You, Marcellus, search the kitchen—maybe there's some food left over—I'm starving."

"At once, Subdecurion!" Two voices promptly answered back. As the sound of footsteps grew louder, Hobson glanced in the direction of the women and little girl, noting with concern their increasing unease as the sound of boots hitting the floor above grew closer and closer until the older woman, her eyes wide with panic and fear, cried out.

"Don't hurt us! We give up!"

"Damn!" Hobson whispered inaudibly as he turned towards Anara, his eyes locking with hers. Immediately understanding what her lover wanted, the Deltan woman placed her hand on the old woman's arm.

Radiating feelings of tranquility and peace, the empath soon quieted the panicky matron, but too late as they heard the gruff voice of the subdecurion command, "Ahenobarbus...Marcellus! Here!" A few moments later, the hidden landing party and the women they were protecting heard the trap door slowly creep open. "All right in there!" The gruff voice barked out, "Come out slowly with your hands up." After a few seconds of silence, the called out again. "If you don't come out, I'll just toss down a grenade. You have three seconds.

Seeing the flash grenade in T'Pren's hands, Hobson nodded his head as the voice counted down, "One..." Before he could count two, the Vulcan security tossed the grenade up as she and the rest of the landing party covered their eyes just in time to avoid being blinded by a brilliant blue-white flash followed almost instantaneously by a crump that shook the ear drums of all in the basement. His ears still ringing, the captain fired his phaser at what appeared to be a man on his knees clutching his face in his hands. Storming up the stairs, T'Pren and Shalev took quick care of the other two soldiers, their phasers stunning the two already dazed men.

"All clear, Sir." T'Pren called down as she and Yitzhak moved quickly to disarm the three men lying on the floor. Moving quickly and efficiently, the security chief bound all three with pieces of rope as the swarthy Shalev took a defensive position near the window.

"Very good, Lieutenant. That was fast thinking on your part." Noting the smile on the young Vulcan's face, the fastidious captain then reproached, "But when we get the time, we will have a little talk about your taking unauthorized equipment on landing parties." Noting in satisfaction the smug grin vanish from the emotional Vulcan's face, Hobson, seeing that the Roman women were now in a near panicked state, called back to Anara, "See if you can settle them down, Commander. We're going to need to move quickly."

"Understood, Sir." Anara replied as she turned her attention back to the women and little girl. Smiling her warmest smile, the empathic Commander Rysyl seemed to radiate waves of calm assurance, soothing not just the frightened women, but also those in the landing party.

"Well done." Chris praised as he placed his hand on his lover's shoulder. Looking into Camilla's eyes, the *Perseus's* captain gently inquired, "Where was your husband and son supposed to report?"

Feeling oddly tranquil in the presence of the dark-haired olive skinned woman standing next to the distinguished looking man speaking to her, Camilla replied, "Before I answer your question, I want you to answer one of mine." Taking the man's gentle nod of his head as assent, the woman asked, her face filled with hope, "Are you the Heralds? Have you returned as the sacred writings foretold?"

Catching at once the Roman woman's reference to 'sacred writings', Hobson spent a few moments in careful thought before speaking in a calm, level tone, "We are not...these...heralds, you're talking about, Camilla. We merely come from a distant island province of the Empire. As you can see from our clothing, we're simple traders and workers—nothing more." Pausing as he mentally crafted his next words, Chris inquired, "But I am interested in these writings you mentioned. What do they say about the return of the Heralds?"

"Later." Camilla answered back, her eyes glinting with renewed hope as she gazed at each member of the landing party. "We have to go now. The lictors will be back soon. Come..." she requested as she, with Anara and Shalev's help, gathered together the other women in the room, Lieutenant Shalev carrying the little toddler in his arms. "I know where to go. You'll be safe there." As the group prepared to leave their basement hiding place, no one noticed the tiny piece of paper dropped by the old woman as she gathered her meager belongings. As she joined the others, her lips turned up into a slight smile. Her daughter and granddaughter might be fools, but she would save them from themselves.

"It has begun." Legate Pompey reported as he strode confidently into the Proconsul's office. "The Twelfth and Thirtieth Legions have crossed into 'Nova Libertas'..." he declared, his lips curling into a sneer as he mentioned the name given to the province by the rebels, "...and we are in control of their capital city."

Looking up from his desk, Proconsul Elabrius grunted before asking sarcastically, "And Valeria Tiberia and her group? What of them? Are they waiting in the antechamber for you to bring them to me in chains?"

His face flushing crimson, the legate responded, his earlier swaggering tone somewhat diminished as he protested “Valeria Tiberia and the members of her cell are still at large, Proconsul. But it’s not the fault of my legionaries! It’s the lictors—your special ‘security police’. They seem to delight more in raping and looting than in doing their jobs.”

“I’ve placed the lictors under your command, Legate!” The proconsul roared back, rising from his chair, “If you can’t control them, then perhaps I should find someone who can.” Seeing that he had sufficiently cowed the man standing before him Elabrius softened his tone slightly as he further inquired, “Do you have any leads at all?”

“Yes, Proconsul.” Pompey replied, “We do. A loyal citizen has left us information as to a probable principle rebel hiding place.” His expression now a mixture of both worry and hope, the legate added, “Even if we don’t capture Valeria Tiberia, we might be able to capture a far greater prize.”

“And that would be?” The Proconsul questioned, the sarcastic edge returning to his voice.

“Barbarians.”

“They’ve returned?” Elabrius exclaimed in a hushed voice, a look of both astonishment and dread on his face.

“If the message we just have received was accurate.” Pompey replied adding, “And it might be.” His lips turning up into a smug grin, the legate explained, “A patrol from the Thirtieth Legion found three lictors bound and gagged in an abandoned house. After releasing them, the subdecurion leading them showed the patrol a root cellar that was apparently being used as a hiding place. That’s where the note was found. Further, the subdecurion told the patrol leader that one of the barbarians threw a grenade that exploded in a bright flash of light. When he and his men woke up, they found themselves tied up.”

“That tells me nothing.” Elabrius growled, shaking his head in disbelief. His eyes glinting steel, the proconsul declared in a low, threatening tone, “I want Valeria Tiberia and her people captured. For now, that is your first priority. If the barbarians have returned, then we will deal with them. Now go and don’t come back until you have that rebel witch in chains.”

Immediately upon hearing the sound of boots crunching on gravel, Camilla, pointed at a darkened alley as she tugged urgently on Hobson's sleeve, "Quick!" She whispered, "In this alley."

"Move." Hobson ordered in a low voice as Anara and Shalev shepherded the four refugees into the safety of the alley. The sound of the boots growing louder, Hobson and T'Pren slipped into the alley just in time as a patrol of soldiers clad in gray uniforms and carrying rifles marched past their position. Watching and waiting until the soldiers had marched out of sight, Chris turned to the Roman woman who was their guide, "That's the third patrol. How much further do we have to go?"

"Not much." The woman answered. "It's just a few streets over."

"Let's hurry then." Hobson urged, "The longer we're out here, the likelier our chances of being discovered."

"You're right." Camilla agreed as she pointed in the direction of a small shop. "It's behind that bakery."

"You heard the lady." Hobson ordered as he turned back to the others, "Let's get a move on before another patrol comes through."

As the party made their way down the alley towards their destination, the old woman muttered under her breath, "Young fools."

Coming to a nondescript house behind and attached to the bakery, Camilla grasped Hobson's arm. "Wait!" She cautioned, "They don't know you. If you approach without warning, they might open fire. I'll go first and let them know you're not soldiers or police."

Nodding his head, Hobson answered back with a simple, "Go."

Crouched down behind a small, but thick, hedgerow Hobson watched carefully as the Roman matron approach the back door of the house. Moments later, he saw her apparently speaking and gesturing excitedly towards where he and the others remained concealed. Then, upon seeing her motion with her hand for them to approach, Chris turned to the others. "Right. We go in. They're probably going to search us. The communicators we can probably explain away as jewelry. But the phasers and tricorders..." Then, his lips turning up into a slight smile, he instructed, "Anara...Shalev...give me

your phasers and tricorders and take the women and go on ahead. T'Pren and I will follow in a few moments."

Waiting until Anara and Shalev had safely led their charges away, Hobson whispered as he securely wrapped their gear up in a piece of cloth. "Note the location, Lieutenant." The captain ordered as he clawed out a hiding place for the devices within the hedgerow, ignoring the scratches from the thorns and brambles. "If we should get separated, you'll be able to find them." Carefully covering up the hiding place, Chris then sounded a cautionary note, "Needless to say, if either of us should get captured, we say nothing about this hiding place—no matter what."

"Understood, Sir." The young Vulcan grimly replied, "Don't worry, Sir. I might be *v'tosh ka'tur*, but I still remember my mental training. I won't break."

"I know you won't." Hobson nodded his head as he tapped his comm badge. "Commander Miller. This is Captain Hobson reporting in. Maintain current status."

"Understood, Sir." The *Perseus's* second officer's voice responded through the comm badge.

"Turning his attention back to his security chief, a slight smile crossed the Iceman's face, "Well, Lieutenant, let's go and meet our new allies."

Crossing the threshold into the house, Hobson and T'Pren were immediately confronted by the sight of two men pointing automatic rifles at the heads of their comrades as another man aimed his pistol directly at a point between the captain's eyes. Give me one good reason why I shouldn't shoot you where you stand."

Maintaining his stoic calm as he gazed straight into the eyes of the man holding the gun on him, Hobson replied in a level tone, "Because if you do then you're an even bigger fool than you look like. Only an idiot kills without reason."

Laughing, the man holding the gun retorted as he cocked the hammer back on his pistol, "I think you're Impie spies. That's reason enough for me."

"If we were 'Impies'..." Chris coolly replied, "...then we would have simply stormed in. We wouldn't have come in with Camilla and her mother and daughters."

“So you say.” The man responded.

“He’s right, Bradleius.” A female voice declared. Entering from the adjacent room, the woman, an attractive chestnut haired woman, accompanied by another woman, this one with olive skin short dark hair, entered the room. “Greetings.” She said as she approached the man holding the gun on Hobson. Gently, but firmly pressing down on her associate’s gun, forcing him to lower it, the woman smiled, “My name is Valeria Tiberia and if you are who I think you are, then we have a great deal to talk about.”

“Rysyla? Could you see to these people?” Valeria Tiberia asked, jerking her head in the direction of Camilla and her family. Speaking to Camilla, the rebel leader spoke in a reassuring voice, “Go with my aide. She’ll see to your needs.”

Instantly upon Valeria Tiberia uttering that name, Anara looked up with a start. Seeing that she was speaking to the woman with short, dark hair, the Deltan first officer turned her attention to the younger woman. As their eyes met, both women immediately felt an almost electric connection. However, before she could speak, the moment was broken as Valeria once again spoke, this time to Captain Hobson.

“And if you and your friends will come with me...” The rebel leader’s words trailed off.

“Christopher.” Hobson helpfully provided. “Just call me Christopher.”

“All right, Christopher.” The chestnut haired woman answered back with a sly grin as she gestured towards the room from which she came, “Come. We have a lot to talk about.”

“Sir?” Anara interjected, “Could I accompany Rysyla and the others?”

Nodding his head in assent, Chris replied in the affirmative, “Go ahead and take Mr. Shalev with you.”

“Thank you, Sir.” The Deltan woman answered back, her lips turning up into a warm smile as she regarded the slender dark haired woman standing before, “Do you mind?”

“No.” Rysyla responded with a hopeful grin of her own, “In fact, I was hoping we could talk.”

Swooping the squealing little toddler up in his arms and putting her up on his shoulders, Yitzhak chuckled merrily, “Wanna go for a ride, Margaret?”

Entering a small office that had been turned into a makeshift headquarters, Captain Hobson shook his head as he noted just how little the number of rebels in Valeria’s main base actually was.

Seeing the look on her guest’s face, Valeria Tiberia nodded her head, “I know what you’re thinking and you’re right. There just aren’t enough of us. If the Romans find us and attack in force...”

“I assume you have escape routes planned for yourself?” Hobson noted, with just the faintest note of cynicism edging into his patrician voice.

The lovely rebel leader responded, her voice now carrying an earnest tone, “Understand one thing, Christopher—or whoever you really are—I care about these people. I—and they—have sworn themselves to this cause. To a better life. Not for ourselves, but for our children.” She uttered as, walking to her desk, she opened a drawer. Taking out a bronze bracelet, she tossed it at Captain Hobson. “Take a look at that and tell me what you see.”

“And while you’re at it...” Bradleius added with a sneer as he handed Hobson the embroidered ‘B’ that he had once worn on his shirt, “...why don’t you look at this as well.”

Examining the bronze bracelet with the engraved broken chain, Hobson ventured, “I would assume this shows that you’re a freed slave?”

“My great-grandmother was actually the slave.” Valeria responded, “She was one of Proconsul Claudius Marcus’s concubines...his favorite in fact. He granted her manumission when she became pregnant with my grandmother.” Her lips turning up into a smirk, she quipped, “I guess he didn’t want his child to be born as a slave.”

“So...your great-grandfather was a proconsul?” Hobson inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Not exactly." Valeria replied, flashing a sly grin. "He only thought that he was the father and great-grandmother was smart enough not to give him reason to think otherwise."

"I see." Chris drawled as he focused his attention on the embroidered patch. "I assume this 'B' indicates that whoever wore it is descended from one the 'barbarians'?"

"Very good." Bradleius interjected with a sarcastic sneer. "My great-grandfather in fact."

"Enough, Bradleius!" Valeria ordered, admonishing her surly aide, "Why don't you go and check on the guards."

Watching as her grumbling assistant strode out the door, the rebel leader apologized, "You must forgive Bradleius, he lost someone close to him in the recent fighting."

"It seems a lot of people have." Hobson noted sympathetically.

"Yes." Valeria agreed, nodding her head sadly, "And I'm afraid a lot more people will die before this is done." Motioning for Chris to take the chair on the other side of her desk, the chestnut haired woman smiled, "So...after so long, why have you decided to come back now?"

Anara looked on, her lips turning up into a warm smile, as Rysyla assisted Camilla and her family into a small room, introducing her to a woman who she called a physician. Watching as Lieutenant Shalev continued to play with the little girl, Anara was startled as Camilla called out to her.

"Thank you, Herald!"

Addressing Rysyla, Anara asked in a low voice as the lithe dark haired woman approached her, "Why did she call me 'Herald'? That's the second time she used that term around me and my people. "

"Come with me." Rysyla smiled as she gently took the Deltan woman's arm, taking a deep breath as the connection that she once again felt the connection that she had felt earlier, "I'll try to explain. And..." she added hopefully as the pair walked down the hallway, "...maybe you can answer a few questions of

my own." Entering a small bedroom, Rysyla, sat down at the edge of a narrow bed, and then motioned for Anara to take a seat on a wooden desk chair facing her. "Camilla is a New Covenanter..."

"I've heard that term before..." Anara interrupted, "What does it mean?"

"When the Originals...the ones people like me are descended from..." Rysyla began haltingly, "They didn't come completely empty handed. Some of them...a few...brought what they could of who they were. Amongst the many things they brought were what many consider to be missing chapters of the Book."

Realizing at once that the cultural contamination that her lover had feared had, in fact, taken place, Anara requested, "Do you have this Book with you?"

"No..." Rysyla replied, shaking her head, "I'm not really a follower of the Son. But I'm sure the woman you brought with you does. Perhaps you can ask to borrow hers later?"

"Thanks, I will." Anara answered back before further inquiring, "So...what makes the New Covenanters different?"

"Like the Old Covenanters, they believe that the Son will return, but unlike the traditional Son worshippers, the New Covenanters believe that the Son's return will be a triumphant one—as a judge and conqueror. That he will end the Empire in fire and usher in a new era. His return, according to the New Covenanters, will be preceded by the arrival of Four Heralds. Many New Covenanters believe that these four Heralds will, like the Originals, come from above."

"Shiara's Kiss..." Anara whispered, "I have to tell Christopher this..."

"Later..." Rysyla pleaded as a troubled look overcame her face as she spoke in a halting voice, "But first...please....I know you had to feel it...when we met because I felt it. A...connection. It's not strong...at least not for me..." she said, shaking her head, "...but it's there. Please don't deny it."

Sighing, Anara debated internally which approach she should take with the troubled young woman seated before her. Be honest and violate the Prime Directive or lie and deny her distant kinswoman. Or, go with a half truth. Deciding on the latter option, the Deltan woman replied in a soft voice, "I...did...feel something. Maybe it's just a form of extra-sensory perception?"

Chuckling nervously, Rysyla answered back, "Open the desk drawer and take out the medallion you see there." Watching as the other woman opened the drawer; the slender dark haired woman nodded her head as she picked up the right piece of jewelry. "That's it. The circle with a 'B' engraved on it. Do you know what that means?" Her laughter growing louder, she answered her own question, "Of course you don't. It means 'Barbarian.' You have to wear one of these if you're a descendent of one of the off-worlders who came here over a century ago." Removing a locket hanging from a gold chain from around her neck, Rysyla handed it to Anara, "Go ahead and open it." Opening it, the Deltan woman gasped as she saw a photograph of a hairless woman, who also was obviously a Deltan as well. "My great-grandmother." Rysyla announced proudly. "She was with the traitor—Merricus. She—like all the other survivors—made sure to pass on who and what they were to their children, who in turn handed the stories down to theirs, who then handed them down to us. So you see, Anara, I know who and what I am." Her lips turning up into a warm smile, the lovely dark haired woman added, "And I know now that I'm no longer alone."

"No..." Anara smiled warmly at her distant kinswoman as she took her hands in hers, "You are not alone...not anymore."

"What are you talking about?" Hobson asked innocently only to be brusquely cut off by Valeria.

"Don't take me for a child or a fool, Christopher. I know who and what you are."

Seeing that only the truth would satisfy the woman seated before him, Chris answered back, "Very well. Then you should know that one of our most important laws is that..."

"You cannot interfere in the affairs of others." Valeria interrupted, "Yes, I know. The Prime Commandment."

"Directive." Hobson automatically corrected only to be waved off by the rebel leader.

"Whatever. Look..." Valeria declared, "I'm not asking you to interfere. I'm not asking you to provide soldiers to fight our battles or even weapons for us."

Inwardly relieved that the rebel leader was not going to ask for military assistance, the Captain of the Perseus asked in a guarded tone, "So...what do you want?"

"The current Proconsul sees this as his opportunity to take care of all of his problems in one brutal campaign. He believes that he can not only exterminate all of the Descendents, but that he can also wipe out the followers of the Son. That's why the fighting has been so brutal. Of the Son worshipers, the Old Covenanters will go to their deaths placidly while the New Covenanters are divided. Some will be like the Old Covenanters and become martyrs without resistance, but others, especially the Children of Flavius, will fight—and fight hard."

"What about you?" Hobson asked, "Where do you fit into this?"

"If you're asking whether am I a Child of Flavius—no...I'm not." Valeria answered, shaking her head, "Although I agree with them that there are things worth fighting for—especially freedom."

"So..." Chris asked, "Why are you doing this? You're not a Son worshipper..."

"I never said I wasn't." The chestnut haired woman chuckled, "I just said that I wasn't one of the Children of Flavius. But you see..." she explained, "...I don't define myself so much as being a follower of the Son so much as being something else. I'm a Descendent."

"You are?" Chris asked with raised eyebrows. "I take it the authorities don't realize that."

"No...they don't. "And, if they ever found out who my real great-grandfather was..." she chuckled, "Well...let's just say that it wouldn't go very pleasantly for me. The funny thing is...even though I've never met him—all I know of him is stories passed down from one generation to the next, I sort of have a love-hate relationship with the man. I love what he did to Claudius Marcus...and how kindly he treated my great-grandmother. But I hate what he did—or rather didn't do for the Originals. That's something you can correct."

"I see..." Hobson drawled. "So...what do you want me to do?"

"I'm not asking anything for myself." Valeria pleaded, "My place is with my

people, but, many of the Descendents...especially the children and elderly..." she shook her head sadly, "...the Romans are killing them out of hand. I want you to take them with you. Give them a safe home. Then maybe...in the future...when the Empire has fallen...they can return. But for now...I just want them away from here...away from the killing."

"I can't make any promises..." Hobson replied in a quiet voice, "But I'll see what I can do."

"I guess that'll have to do, then." The rebel leader sighed, and then shaking her head, added, "You know..." she said, managing a shaky grin, "You still haven't asked me who my great-grandfather was."

"I have a pretty good idea." Chris responded. However, before he could continue, Bradleius entered the room.

"Valeria." The young man called out in an urgent voice, "Junius reports that two large Roman forces are headed this way. One of them is has a *testudo*." He added somberly, referring to the lightly armored cars that the Romans used for riot suppression.

"We have to go." Valeria quietly announced. "Christopher. You and your friend come with me. Bradleius..." She requested, turning to her friend. "Go to Rysyla...tell her to guide Christopher's friends and the refugees to the redoubt and then meet up with us outside." Turning to Hobson, the rebel leader managed a shaky grin. "We have to go now. They'll be here soon."

"My other people..." Chris began only to be cut off.

"Will be fine." Valeria assured, "Rysyla will see them to safety. We can't travel in one group—there are so many of us that if we do we'll stand out at once."

Seeing the wisdom of her strategy, Chris nodded his head, "Very well." Tapping his comm badge, the Perseus's captain spoke, "Hobson to Rysyl..."

Hearing her comm badge chirp and then her captain and lover's voice calling out to her, Anara quickly responded, ignoring for now the look of astonishment on the face of the young woman, "Rysyl here."

"We have a problem, Commander." Chris declared, "Roman troops are on the way here. You, Lieutenant Shalev, and the women are to go with...Rysyla. They'll take you to a location where you'll meet up with T'Pren and myself."

"Understood, Sir." The Deltan commander replied.

"I'll see you later, Anara." Hobson concluded as he ended the transmission, the slightly worried note in his voice only apparent to his lover. "Be careful."

"You too." Anara answered back as she turned back to the slender dark haired woman who had already risen to her feet.

"Your name..." Rysyla gasped, "Are we..."

"We can talk about that later." Anara interrupted, speaking in a kindly, yet urgent, voice. "Right now though, we have to get the others. We don't have much time."

"You're right." Rysyla agreed, "Come. We have to hurry."

"Have you finished?" An impatient Valeria asked.

"Yes." Hobson replied as he motioned T'Pren to join them. "We're ready when you are."

"Good." Valeria declared as she motioned for one of the guards to join them. "Let's get the Hades out of here." A worried look on her face, the young rebel remarked in an almost inaudible voice, "I hope it isn't already too late."

PART 3

“Hurry!” Rysyla urged in a hushed tone as she guided Anara, Shalev, and the other refugees, little Margaret cradled in the helmsman’s arms. “The soldiers will be here any second.” Moving swiftly, the little group stopped at a darkened street corner. Peering around the corner, the lithe dark-haired Descendent ducked her head back quickly. Bringing her finger to her lips, she signaled for everyone to be quiet as a bright light shone down the road.

Clinging close to the shadows, Anara held her breath as an armored car appeared, a helmeted soldier manning a machine gun mounted in the cupola. A squad of men on foot, their weapons at the ready and looking right and left, moved behind the armored car as it travelled slowly down the road. Watching in relief as the soldiers passed them by, Anara was about to exhale when the old woman cried out.

“Here! We surrender!”

“Mother!” Camilla whispered as the old woman stood up, making herself visible in the spotlight now shining on where they had been concealed.

“All right you!” A voice called out from a loudspeaker mounted on the armored car as the man manning the machinegun pivoted his weapon in the direction of the spotlight. “Come out now with your hands up or we open fire!”

Gritting her teeth, Anara reluctantly nodded at the woman crouched next to her. As both women stood up, Anara spotted a small alley opening near Yitzhak’s position. Praying that the helmsman had spotted the escape route as well, Anara, standing up, held up her hands, signaling the rest of the group to do as well. The other women, following the Deltan woman’s lead, also stood up and began moving slowly towards where the old woman stood. Watching as the women gathered together, a voice once again rang out from the loudspeaker as the foot soldiers approached. “On your knees with your hands clasped behind your head—NOW!”

“Do as he says.” Anara whispered as she caught Yitzhak out of the corner of her eyes, the little toddler bound to his chest, quietly slip out down the tiny alleyway. Letting out a sigh of relief, the Deltan first officer slowly knelt down and placed her hands behind her head, the others soon following her example.

“What in Hades are you doing?” Valeria Tiberia called out as Hobson and T’Pren dashed towards the hidden cache where they had put their phasers and tricorders. Recovering their devices, the chestnut haired Hobson replied as they rejoined the rebel leader. “We had to pick something up.”

“Whatever it was, I hope it was important.” Valeria answered back as she pointed towards a back alley. “This way. It leads to a storm drain opening. We make it there...then we should be safe.”

“Let’s go then.” Chris responded, taking position next to Valeria as T’Pren dropped back beside Bradleius. Hearing the sound of a large vehicle drawing nearer, the *Perseus*’ captain declared, “If that’s what I think it is, we don’t have much time.”

Sprinting as fast as they could, the little group made it into the cover of the alley just in time as a squad of soldiers accompanied by an armored car appeared before the door of the rebel hideout. “Testudo.” Valeria whispered as the turret of the armored car rotated to face the doorway of the building. Moments later, the sound of large caliber machinegun fire echoed throughout the area as the doorway disappeared in a shower of splinters. “That’s why we had to get out fast. Nothing can stand up to one of those.”

Knowing that while that armored car probably couldn’t stand up against even an old World War I tank, it could very easily kill him and everyone with him, Chris grunted his agreement as he motioned in the direction of the storm grate. “We better get going.” He advised, “Hopefully Anara’s made it out safely by now.”

Watching dejectedly from his hiding place as the Romans led Commander Rysyl, her hands bound behind her back, into the back of a waiting truck along with the other women, Lieutenant Yitzhak Shalev whispered softly into the ear of the little toddler he was holding tightly to his breast. “Sssshhhh...little one. This is just like hide and seek...we don’t want them to find us. Come on...” he said gently as the pair slipped even deeper into the shadows, “...we have to go. Don’t worry, we’ll see your mother again...” his face taking on a grim demeanor, he solemnly vowed, “I promise.”

Keeping to the shadows as he made his way through the alleyway, Yitzhak froze as he heard a noise, "Pssst...over here." Barely perceiving the forms of a man and woman in the darkness motioning for him to join them, Shalev cautiously approached, holding the little toddler's hand as he brandished a two-by-four in his other hand.

"Who are you?" The helmsman demanded in a low, raspy tone as he gently pushed the little girl behind him.

"Friends." The man replied, "You look like you could some right now."

"If you really are friends..." a skeptical Shalev replied, "...then you're right. But how do I know you're not going to turn us in for a reward?"

"You don't." The man confessed with a shrug of his shoulders, "But you don't really have much of a choice, do you?"

"Not really." Yitzhak admitted as he hefted his makeshift club, "All right...lead on...but don't make me regret my decision."

As the women sat in the tiny dingy holding cell they were herded into, Camilla turned towards her mother. "Why did you do it?" She asked in an anguished voice, "Why did you betray us?"

"I didn't betray you." The old woman snapped back, "I saved you! The Empire cannot be defeated...it is eternal. We cannot change how things are. And these people..." she sneered as she pointed her finger angrily at Anara and Rysyla seated together on the other bed, her voice dripping with a mixture of resentment and revulsion, "...you would let these barbarians return to finish what they started years ago—to destroy us!"

"That's not true, Mother." Camilla cried out, "It wasn't the fault of the First Ones—they didn't want to be stranded here. They were betrayed." Turning her back on the elderly woman, the distraught woman shook her head as she repeated her words, "Just as you betrayed us. Just as you betrayed my daughter." She concluded in a soft, mournful tone.

"I'm sorry, Anara..." Rysyla said in a sad tone as she looked into the eyes of her distant kinswoman. "I'm sorry you got caught with us..."

"It's not your fault." The Deltan Starfleet officer answered back reassuringly, placing her hand on the hand of the younger woman, "Things happen." Shaking her head, her lips turned up into a crooked grin, "It's too bad they took my jewelry away when they searched us, though."

Before her fellow prisoner could reply, however, four men, each wearing the tan uniforms of the Proconsul's personal security force and carrying submachineguns at the ready approached their cell door. The leader of the squad, looking down his nose at the women, ordered disdainfully, "On your feet. Now!"

"Where are we going?" Anara demanded as she rose off the bed.

Laughing, the squad leader replied, "You're being granted a special privilege. You have been granted a personal audience by the Proconsul. Now..." he barked out as he gestured towards the corridor with his SMG, "Move!"

"And here they are, General...right on time!" Proconsul Elabrius grinned sardonically as he held his hands out in a display of faux welcoming. His eyes falling on Anara, the mocking grin turned rapidly into a leer as he commented to the general standing beside him, "Today's catch makes up for your failure to capture Valeria Tiberia, Pompey." Addressing his next words to the woman standing before him, the proconsul asked in a honeyed voice, "And what is your name, my dear?"

"Anara." The Deltan first officer simply replied, her eyes matching the gaze of the man interrogating her.

"She's a barbarian!" The old woman blurted out. "Don't trust a word she says!"

"I know." The proconsul responded with an insincere smile. Turning towards his receptionist/slave, he ordered, "Tell Gaius at Imperial Broadcasting I want him to do a workup for this woman. We're going to make her 'Citizen of the Week.' Standard routine here: spotlight her awareness and courage in turning in enemies of the Empire, that sort of thing. And be sure to tell him to edit out any mention of barbarians. We don't need rumors of that spreading around right now." His attention focused back on the old woman, Elabrius's smile returned, "You are to be honored for your service to the Empire, Madame. Go with my receptionist, she'll see to your needs and tonight you will get to see

yourself on television.”

“Yes, my lord.” The receptionist meekly replied, giving Anara a brief apologetic glance as she and the now giddy old woman slipped out of the office.

Waiting until after the two women had exited the office, Proconsul Elabrius once again spoke to Anara. “Now that that is taken care of...” he stated in a jovial tone as he examined the Deltan woman’s comm badge, “...perhaps you can tell me what this does?”

Her lips turning up into the faintest of smiles, Anara answered back in a soft tone, “It’s nothing but a piece of jewelry, Proconsul, given to me by my lover.”

His smile now replaced by a chuckle, the proconsul turned on the television monitor set into the wall. Ten kneeling figures—men, women, and children—appeared on the screen. Behind each stood a soldier armed with a pistol pointed at the back of their heads. Elabrius’s laughter vanished to be replaced by a cold, icy expression. “If you don’t tell me the truth right now...” he declared as soldiers also pointed their weapons at Camilla and Rysyla, “...I will order first those ten hostages to be executed and then your friends. So...what does this ‘piece of jewelry’ do?”

Exhaling deeply, Anara reluctantly confessed, “It is a communications device.”

“Ah...good!” Elabrius exulted. “See that wasn’t so hard now, was it?” His expression once again turning serious, he further inquired as the soldiers maintained their aim on the hostages, “How does it work?”

Feeling the cold purpose radiating from the menacing figure before her, Anara tapped the comm badge three times. .

“Mr. Miller...” Ensign Tanar, an Efrosian currently manning the tactical station, called out, “Receiving a Code Green signal from Commander Rysyl’s comm badge.”

“Right.” The dark skinned acting captain remarked grimly, “She’s in trouble, but we’re not to take any action as yet. Open up the comm line, we might not be able to do anything, but at least we can listen in.”

“Happy?” Anara asked, her voice tinged with just the faintest bit of smoldering sexuality as she looked at the man standing before her.

"We'll see." Elabrius replied with a cough. "Tell whoever it is on the other end that I want to speak with them." After finishing his instructions, the proconsul gestured at the two guards standing on either side of Anara who then immediately pointed the barrels of their submachineguns at the Deltan woman's head, the end of their weapons' barrels pressing on her skin. "Oh...and if you have any ideas of disappearing...you won't make it before these guards put a pair of bullet holes into that lovely head of yours. And then afterwards I will kill all the hostages."

"Understood." Anara answered back, grimly. Speaking into the comm badge, she called out, "Rysyl to Miller..."

"Miller here, Commander."

"We have a situation, Mr. Miller." Anara stated, only to be cut off by her captor.

"Listen carefully..." Elabrius interrupted in a threatening tone, "Your people are our 'guests'. Do as I say and they shall be treated properly and returned to you. But, if you make any effort at a rescue or if they should suddenly disappear or if by some chance a mysterious power blackout takes place, I will execute one thousand hostages. Your person here will verify that I am telling you the truth." He concluded, nodding his head at Anara.

"Is he telling the truth, Commander?"

"I..." Anara replied in a soft voice, "...am a prisoner. And yes, he does have hostages and he is more than capable of killing them. You are to take no action at this time."

Picking up at once on the first officer's verbal cue, Devon nodded his head gravely as he spoke, "Very well, Commander. We'll stand down as ordered." Taking a breath, the acting captain inquired, "What are the terms for the Commander's release?"

"I will dictate the terms later." Elabrius answered back gloatingly. "For now, you just do as you are told." Turning his attention back to Anara, the proconsul ordered, "End the transmission."

Touching the comm badge once, Anara answered back, "I've closed the channel."

“Good.” Elabrius responded as he retrieved the comm badge, his heart racing as his skin momentarily touched that of his sultry prisoner. Addressing the guards, he commanded, “Take the prisoners back to their cells. I’ll decide what to do with them later.” Watching as the guards escorted the barbarian and the other woman out of the room, the proconsul once again flashed a leer as he observed the retreating form of the Deltan woman. His leer turning into a smug grin as the door closed behind the prisoners, the proconsul turned towards his legate, “This time, Pompey...we will not make the mistakes Claudius Marcus made.”

“Proconsul?” The general interjected, “What do you mean?”

“This time, we are going to force these barbarians to help us. I intend to use them...” the proconsul explained, his smirk now turning into a gloating smile, “...to not only crush the rebellion, but also to make sure that no other barbarians will ever dare threaten to come here again.”

“How?” Pompey asked.

“Watch, Legate...” Elabrius replied, as erotic visions of the barbarian woman flashed through his mind, “Watch and learn.”

Turning to his tactical officer, Lieutenant Commander Miller ordered, “Raise the captain.”

“Sir?” Ensign Chelana, the acting helmsman, delicately interjected, the white furred arboreal lemur-like Alethian’s tail gently twitching as she spoke, “What if the Captain is taken prisoner as well?”

“But he’s not.” Miller replied, his lips turning up in a sly grin, “At least not by the same people who’ve taken Commander Rysyl. Didn’t you catch it when the commander said ‘I am a prisoner’?”

“I get it now, sir.” The young ensign answered back with a grin of her own, her white teeth standing out against the chocolate brown markings on her face.

“Opening channel.” Ensign Tanar interrupted from his position at tactical.

As the tiny group made its way through the dank and fetid tunnels of the underground storm drain system, Valeria turned towards the man walking

behind her and whispered in a low voice. "We're almost there. Just a few more minutes."

"Good." Captain Hobson replied. "These tunnels seem to have no end."

"If you don't know where you're going..." the rebel leader answered back with a grin, "...it's easy to get lost in here. Some of the tunnels lead straight into the catacombs and they've been around as long as the Empire."

"How do you know your way around?" T'Pren interjected, her curiosity aroused.

"A lot I learned from my father." Valeria replied, "He used to work in them." Her voice taking on a wistful quality, she explained, "He'd bring me along sometimes when there was no school and mother and grandmother weren't looking. I'd play in them when I was little and as I grew older, I'd study his maps. Then...after he was arrested and..." her voice faltering for a moment, the young woman continued, "...well...that's what made me join the rebellion and since then, let's just say that the tunnels have been very helpful to us."

"And the Imperials don't pursue you down here?" T'Pren further inquired.

"Of course they do." Valeria answered back with a cold laugh. "But...like I said...it can be very dangerous down here. Getting lost is the least of the dangers. There are animals...dangerous animals...that like to nest here. And we've left some surprises of our own." She declared as she pointed at an almost invisible wire stretched across the passageway. "Like that. Trip that wire and...well...let's just say that the results would be unpleasant for you and anyone immediately in front of or behind you. Be careful!" She called out as she gingerly stepped over the wire.

As the last of the group stepped over the wire, Chris heard his comm badge chirp. Tapping his badge, he responded, "Hobson here."

"Sir?" Lieutenant Commander Miller's voice came out from the comm badge, "We have a problem." After a momentary pause, the operations officer delivered his bad news, "Commander Rysyl and the women with her have been taken prisoner. The Romans have her. They warned us that any attempt at beaming her out or beaming in a security team will result in the execution of at least a thousand hostages."

"The Proconsul means it too." Valeria, listening in on the conversation,

interjected.

"Hold position for now." Hobson ordered in his usual level, patrician tone. "Are you able to get a lock on to her position through her subcutaneous transponder?"

"No, sir." The operations officer ruefully replied. "In fact, we're unable to lock on to any of your transponder signals at this time. Doctor Nor and Lieutenant Velen think that it might be a result of the slightly higher than earth normal concentrations of xenon gas in the atmosphere in combination with increased solar activity and the planet's closer proximity to its sun at this time of year. Lieutenant Velen says that the condition is only temporary and should clear up in about forty-eight hours, but..."

"But that's not going to help Anara or us at the moment." Hobson interrupted, completing his second officer's thoughts

"Do you want us to beam you up, sir?"

"Negative." The captain answered back. "There are some complications we've discovered before the commander was captured that we need to find out more about before we can leave..."

"Complications, sir?"

"Yes." Chris replied in a level tone, "It seems that the cultural contamination left behind by the *Beagle* and *Enterprisecrews* was greater than we had anticipated. I'll inform you about it later. In any event, T'Pren and I are probably in a better position to react to events here than we would be back on the ship."

"And the others in the landing party, sir? I assume Lieutenant T'Pren is with you, but what about Lieutenant Shalev?"

"Lieutenant T'Pren is with me. As for Lieutenant Shalev..." Hobson began, pausing momentarily before continuing, "Assuming he wasn't captured with Commander Rysyl and the rest of her group, we should presume that he is still free and evading pursuit."

"I can have people look for him." Valeria offered, "Find out whether he's in a dangerous situation or not. If he's found a safe haven, it might be useful to have someone in reserve..."

"Good point." Chris agreed. Addressing his operations officer again, the captain inquired, "How is Treasure proceeding on our emergency plan."

"She says she could do it easily, but..." Miller warned, "...the proconsul was quite clear as to what would happen if any 'sudden blackouts' occurred."

"We'll have to time things just right then." Hobson replied, his stoic mask still in place. Seeing Valeria growing impatient, the captain concluded, "While the proconsul is planning out his next move, we'll be doing the same. We'll contact you once we're in a secure location and proceed from there."

"Aye, sir. We'll be ready when you are." Lieutenant Commander Miller answered back as he terminated the transmission.

Watching as the barbarian starship captain turned towards her, Valeria Tiberia noted the icy glint in his eyes as well as the cool exterior he projected. The only indicator to the rebel leader that the man standing before her was capable of any emotion at all was the slightest tensing of his lower jaw muscle as he spoke in his quiet, patrician tone, "Lead the way, Ms. Tiberia. We have work we need to do and, as you Romans say, *tempus fugit*."

"Right." Valeria replied as she motioned for the group to continue. Signaling for T'Pren to join her, she whispered into the alien woman's ear, "Is he always like this?"

"Like what?" The young Vulcan asked.

"This cold...this detached." Valeria replied. "The Proconsul has taken his people...yet it seems that he doesn't even care."

"Oh...he cares, all right." T'Pren answered back, her lips turned down into a frown, "There's a reason why we call him the Iceman. He won't let his anger get the better of him, but make no mistake about it, he's mad." Shaking her head, the Vulcan woman concluded as the group proceeded down the tunnel, "All I can say is, I'm glad I'm not that proconsul. He's about to get a lesson he'll never forget."

Holding on tightly to Margaret while keeping a wary eye their new-found friends, Yitzhak allowed the couple to lead him and his charge through the darkened back alleys of the city until they reached a doorway. Then, after a

series of knocks, the door opened. "Come in." The woman whispered back to the young Starfleet officer, "You and the little one will be safe here."

Crossing the threshold, Shalev found himself in a tiny one room apartment inhabited by an elderly couple, the man wearing what appeared to be a skullcap and the woman a scarf over her head. Watching, Yitzhak saw that the couple who had guided him to the house had covered their heads as well. Feeling a piece of cloth pressed into his hands, the Eretz Israeli native at once covered and bowed his head as the old man recited a prayer in what sounded to Shalev to be Old Hebrew. Gently restraining the fidgeting young toddler, Shalev waited patiently until the elder had finished his prayer. Joining the others in a softly stated "Amen", Yitzhak waited calmly as the young man approached the elderly man.

"Rabbi." The young man said in a respectful tone, "Rachel and I found this man and the little girl with him hiding from the Romans who had captured his friends. We thought it best..." the man said in an almost supplicating voice, "...to bring them here."

"You did right, Avram." The old man answered back with a smile. "All who are in need of shelter should be made welcome." Gesturing towards Yitzhak, the rabbi called out, "Young man...come here, please. I would like to see you better." Turning to the woman beside him, the old man grinned, "Deborah...would you please bring us some tea and perhaps some milk for the little one."

Nodding his head, Shalev, taking Margaret by the hand, approached the old man. As he drew closer, it seemed to the young helmsman that he was once again a little boy back home in Eretz Israel on his first day in Schule as the elder's penetrating gaze seemed to look into his very soul. Nodding his head approvingly as his eyes took in the younger man, the rabbi declared with knowing smirk, "Unless I miss my guess, young man, you come from very far away, indeed."

"Yes." Yitzhak replied, keeping to the cover story, "My friends and I come from a distant province and, unfortunately, got caught up by events here."

"I see..." the old man responded with a chuckle, "...a distant province? Would that by any chance be the same distant province another group of wanderers came from over a hundred years ago?"

"Very probably." Shalev admitted.

"I thought as much." The rabbi said, the knowing grin returning to his face, "Do you have a name, wanderer?"

"My name is Yitzhak. Yitzhak Shalev." The helmsman replied, hearing gasps from the couple behind him.

"Are you..." Avram asked in a hushed tone, "...are you a child of Isaac?"

"I'm Jewish, if that's what you mean." Yitzhak replied, somewhat confused. "And the province I come from is called Eretz Israel."

"Then you and your young friend are especially welcome." His lips turning up into a smile as his wife came in bearing a tray with cups of steaming hot tea and a glass of milk, the old man gestured at the chair next to his, "Come...sit. We have much to talk about."

"I can't believe she betrayed us." Camilla, sitting on the edge of one of the tiny cots in the little prison cell holding the three women, sobbed as Anara and Rysyla attempted to comfort her. "Why would she do a thing like that to us—her own family?"

"Don't be too hard on her." Anara replied in a comforting voice as she simultaneously used her empathic senses to soothe the tormented woman. "She was frightened for you and your child. She didn't want to see either of you hurt and thought she was saving your lives."

"She wanted to save our lives?" Camilla cried out in disbelief. "By turning us over to the Romans?"

"The Empire is a master at sapping people's desire for freedom." Rysyla remarked somberly. "Many are lured by its promises of security. Job security...guaranteed retirement pensions...readily available health care...protection against crime...free education for the young...all are available. All you have to give up in exchange is your freedom." Shaking her head, the young woman continued, "That's the carrot. If that doesn't work, the Empire is more than willing to use the stick. The Lictors and secret police are very good at what they do. Then there is the surety of punishment. Perpetual enslavement...the Games...the Empire can be very creative when it wants to be."

"Then how is your group able to even keep going—much less mount as effective a resistance as you seem to have done?" A curious Anara inquired as her empathic senses told her that the woman sobbing next to her was slowly calming down.

Sighing, Rysyla answered back, "Valeria's the one who's pulled us all together. It's always been hard for those of us who are Descendents, New Covenanters, Old Covenanters, or children of Isaac, but we've never really been able to work with each other. The Old Covenanters and children of Isaac have always viewed the Descendents as outsiders because of our barbarian heritage and view the New Covenanters as heretics as well as being tainted by contact with us Descendents, while those of us Descendents who are not New Covenanters view them as being zealots and the Old Covenanters and children of Isaac as being too hidebound to change."

"So..." Anara asked, "...how did Valeria get everyone to work together?"

"She showed everyone that all they were doing was doing the Empire's work for them." Rysyla smiled, "She explained how the different proconsuls were continually playing the groups off against each other..."

"Divide and conquer..." Anara interjected.

"An old trick of the Empire." Rysyla agreed. "It took some talking and a lot of persistence, but eventually Valeria was able to bring them around. That's when Elabrius began to really take notice."

"Because he's now dealing with a united resistance." Anara surmised.

"Right." Rysyla affirmed, nodding her head as two guards approached their cell. "And here we are."

"You!" One of the guards commanded, pointing at Anara, "On your feet. The Proconsul wishes to speak with you."

Standing up, Anara looked down on her distant kinswoman, "Take care of her." She instructed, her eyes drifting to Camilla, "I'll be back as soon as I can." Her voice dropping to a whisper, she murmured as a momentary look of disgust crossed her features, "I'm going to try to buy us some time."

Exiting the tunnel system in what was obviously a cemetery, Valeria pointed

towards a large fenced in crypt. "Over there." The rebel leader smiled, "The tomb of Claudius Marcus."

A slight chuckle escaped the normally stony faced Hobson as he quipped, "The perfect hiding place—a Proconsul's tomb."

"Exactly." Valeria replied. "This is the last place they'd think of looking—but we better hurry—just in case a patrol does come by."

"Good point." Chris agreed, "Let's move." Entering the crypt, Hobson watched as the chestnut haired woman walked over to the wall next to an ornate sarcophagus. Pressing one of the stones on the wall, a slight grin crossed the captain's face as a section of the wall opened to reveal a narrow passageway.

"This'll take us to where the rest of our people are." Valeria declared as she stepped into the passage, "Follow me." Following the rebel leader down the constricted and twisting tunnel until, reaching the end, Hobson blinked as he and the others entered a large room faintly lit by candles and a few dim bulbs. Seeing a dark haired man, with a submachine gun hanging loose by his side on a sling talking to a slender red headed woman carrying what appeared to be a sawed-off shotgun slung across her back, Valeria called out, "Junius?"

"Valeria!" The man responded, a smile on his lips until he spotted the strangers accompanying the rebel leader. Quickly bringing his weapon to the ready, he demanded as the redhead smoothly readied her shotgun, "Who are these people?"

"Friends." Valeria Tiberia responded, adding in an emphatic tone, "...from very far away."

"So...you've returned." The woman remarked as she slowly lowered her weapon. "What took you so long?"

"Where's Rysyla?" Junius then asked as he looked anxiously from one newcomer to the other. "I thought she was with you."

"She was captured." Bradleius interjected. "The Proconsul has her and one of the barbarians."

"Her name..." Chris declared in a quiet, yet dangerous voice, to the headstrong young rebel, "Is Anara."

"Anara..." Valeria quickly explained, interposing herself between Hobson and her impetuous assistant, "...and Rysyla...were taken along with three others. Another one of Captain Hobson's people..." she said, nodding her head in the direction of the starship captain, "...managed to get away with a little girl. One of our groups or maybe some of the children of Isaac might have found them." Addressing her next remarks to the woman, the rebel leader instructed, "I need you, Livia, to make contact with Rabbi Ashkel or with Avram or one of the others, while Junius checks with the other cells."

"Will do, Valeria." Livia acknowledged as she left the room, taking an exit opposite from the one where Valeria and the others had entered.

Watching as the redheaded Livia departed, Valeria turned back to Chris, "Captain...come with me. There's something else I think you should see.

"Very well." Chris allowed, nodding his head once, "T'Pren." He then instructed, addressing his security chief, "Remain here and coordinate with Junius and Livia. I want to know where Lieutenant Shalev is." Following his guide down another set of dark, narrow, winding corridors and passageways, Hobson finally stepped into a tiny alcove, its walls lined with books.

"It's here." Valeria said as she walked towards one of the bookshelves. Taking one of the books out, the rebel leader wiped the dust off the covers. Repressing a sneeze, she handed the book to the starship captain standing behind her. "Remember when I told you my father used to work in the tunnels and that I would wander along with him?" Taking Hobson's single nod of the head as an answer, she continued to narrate her tale, "Well, one day I stumbled into this room—that's how I found our hideout. I also found this book—and others like it." Shaking her head, the lovely revolutionary remarked ruefully, "Unfortunately, I couldn't understand what it says—nor could my father or anyone else I know. Father told me that it was written in the ancient language and that only a very few scholars could translate it now and that they're all closely watched by the Impies." Shrugging her shoulders, Valeria concluded, "Maybe you can make something of it."

As Hobson opened the aged tome and his eyes fell upon the text, his lips turned up into a slight smile as he at once recognized the language. Taking a deep breath, the starship captain and classical scholar read aloud the title and dedication, "*De Novam Romam*—Concerning New Rome...written by Titus Aurelianus in the thirtieth year after the Arrival."

"You understand what it says?" Valeria exclaimed with a gasp.

“Yes.” Hobson replied with a single nod of his head, “It’s written in classic Latin.” His lips turning up into a slight smile, Chris remarked as he began to read further, “I think this book will answer a great many questions.”

Taking a sip of his tea, Lieutenant Shalev regarded the old man sitting next to him. “Rabbi?” The youthful helmsman respectfully inquired, “How did you...how did...”

“How did the Children of Isaac find themselves here?” The old man completed with a chuckle. “Until now, my boy...” The rabbi said as he sipped his drink, “That story has only been told within the families of rabbis...passed on from father to son, but only amongst those of us who were destined to be teachers...so as to not endanger the People should the Imperials discover that there are others who know the truth. But now, I think it is time that others know.” Motioning with his hand for the young couple standing a respectful distance back to join them, the elder declared, “Come, Avram...Rachel...it is time for you and all the others to hear this. My children, much of what you have been taught in the Roman schools is a lie. We—and the Empire—have not always been here. We were brought here by others long ago...”

PART 4

Watching as the offworlder beside her read through the dusty tome she had just given him, Valeria asked curiously, "Can you really read what it says? I can't understand more than a few words here and there—and neither could my father."

"I'm not surprised." Hobson replied, the faintest of smiles appearing on his face. Seeing the look of umbrage appearing on the younger woman's face, the starship captain quickly explained, "I meant no reflection on you or your abilities. It's just that languages change with time—and your Latin has had over two thousand years to change. It would be like me trying to read Old English or Old French. Sure...I could make out a few words or phrases, but that would be it."

"I see..." Valeria answered back as she walked back to the bookcase. Retrieving a flat object the size of a padd, but shiny and with a slot in one of its sides, from behind one of the books, she handed it to the captain. "I don't know what this is..." the rebel leader admitted, "I found it near where I found the book. At first I wasn't sure whether I should give it to you or not..." she confessed with a shrug of her shoulders, "But I can't even figure out what it is—much less do anything with it. Maybe you might have a better idea?"

"Hmmm..." the starship captain vocalized as he took out his tricorder. "It appears to be a device intended to play back log entries. "Did you find anything else along with it? Something that might fit into this slot, perhaps?"

"No." The rebel leader answered back, shaking her head. "I'm sorry. There was just that, the book, and some other ancient books. Why?"

"Well..." Chris explained, "If we can find the disk or disks that match this player, those, along with this book, might just help us free our people." Collecting the items, the poker-faced captain advised, "We should get back. Hopefully your people will have found my missing man."

"Hurry up, Valeria!" Bradleius called out as Hobson and Valeria emerged from the entrance to the passageway to find the headstrong descendent along with the *Perseus's* security chief, T'Pren, and a small gathering of Valeria's

insurgents gathered around a portable black and white picture television set. "The Bullshit Hour's about to start."

Chuckling at the starship captain's raised eyebrow, Valeria explained, "It's a weekly propaganda broadcast where they like to announce the 'Citizen of the Week.' We watch it 'cause sometimes they let something useful slip. Come on!" She exclaimed as she motioned towards the couch where space had been made for the newcomers. As the two sat down on the sofa, the image of a dark haired middle-aged man filled the screen.

"This is Gaius Agricola and you are watching Tui Imperium—Your Empire. We have a special guest on tonight's show. A true patriot, this elderly matron helped the brave legions of your Empire deliver a crushing blow to the rebels. Fellow citizens, welcome our Citizen of the Week, Antonia Sulpecia.

Watching the television, Bradleius snorted, "Well, now we know how the Impies figured out where our headquarters was and how your people got captured. The witch betrayed us."

"Shhh..." Hobson replied, holding up his hand, "I want to watch this."

"Be quiet, Bradleius." Valeria interjected as she turned her attention back to the program, "I want to see this too."

Turning to the woman now seated next to his desk, the talk show host inquired, an insincere smile on his face, *"Welcome to Tui Imperium, Lady Antonia and congratulations on being named Citizen of the Week. To get us started, why don't you tell us about yourself?"*

As the program continued, Valeria remarked to the stone-faced starship captain seated next to her, "I'm surprised. I'd have thought Elabrius would have played up your role in all this. It would have turned most of the population—even many Son Worshipers against us."

A thoughtful look on his face, Hobson replied, "Under normal circumstances, you would be right; it would have played into the xenophobic tendencies of much of this society." Quickly turning his head towards the rebel leader, the fastidious starship captain quickly added, "No offense."

"None taken." The chestnut haired beauty responded with a slight grin, "You're right. We are very distrustful of outsiders. But go on...you were saying?"

“Right.” Chris answered back, returning to the topic at hand, “What can you tell me about the Proconsul?”

“Well...” Valeria drawled as she considered her guest’s question, “He’s ambitious...but no real connections at the Imperial Court.” A sly grin crossing her face, she added, “I’ve heard some rather interesting rumors about how he got his position—a bit of bribery...some blackmail...a well timed assassination or two.”

“It’s falling into place now.” Hobson concluded, nodding his head sagely, “It would appear that he’s planning on using us in a power grab.”

“You don’t honestly think he’s going to try for the throne, do you?” Valeria exclaimed, a look of astonishment on her face. “That’s an incredibly ballsy—and dangerous—move.” Shaking her head, the rebel leader demurred, “I don’t see Elabrius as being that bold a man.”

“But he is an opportunist.” Chris countered, “He probably thinks that if he can gain access to our weapons and technology...”

“That it’d be a walkover for him.” Valeria completed, “And he’d be right.” A grave look on her face, the young woman asked with a worried tone, “He can’t—can he?”

“No.” The starship captain responded, adamantly shaking his head. “My people won’t let him. Besides...” He added, a rare slight grin crossing his features, “Leaving out the fact that Anara is probably doing everything she can to create problems for the proconsul from her end, soon, thanks to what we found in the catacombs, Elabrius will have more than enough to keep him occupied.”

“I hope you’re right.” The rebel leader sighed as the program came to an end, “Because if this doesn’t work...then we’re all going to be the main attraction on the Saturday Night Games.”

“So...” Yitzhak inquired as the aged rabbi finished his talk, “...you’re saying that you...the Children of Isaac...were here before the Romans?”

“Yes.” The old man replied, nodding his head. Looking up at his wife, he then requested, “Deborah? Would you please show our young friend the relic?”

“Are you sure, Ashkel?” The elderly woman asked, giving her husband a worried look. “What if...”

A gentle smile on his lips, the rabbi answered back, “The time is right, my dear. I feel it in my bones. Go...please.”

Returning several moments later, Deborah gently and reverently placed an object wrapped in a blue and white prayer shawl in the Starfleet officer’s hands. “Go ahead, my boy.” The old man encouraged as Shalev gave him a questioning look.

Gently unwrapping the package, Yitzhak’s eyes opened wide in surprise as he gazed on a palm sized silver disk that glinted in the light as if it were made of silver or platinum. “This looks like a data recording.” Shalev conjectured and then inquired, “Where did you get this?”

“It has been passed on from generation to generation.” Rabbi Ashkel responded, “It was given to Zevulun, first rabbi by the one who saved us, Sambatyon before he left us.”

“If this is true...” Yitzhak said in a low whisper, “...that means that you’re descended from one of the Ten Tribes...” Pausing for a moment to gather his wits, the young man asked, “May I please see your Tanakh?”

Nodding his head in assent, the white haired rabbi motioned for his wife to fetch the Bible sitting on a table all to itself. Carefully wrapping the tiny disk back in its package as the elderly woman fetched the holy book from its place on a table, Yitzhak handed the relic back to its owner as Deborah handed him the Tanakh. Opening the book, Shalev took a deep breath as he saw that the last of the books that he remembered from his childhood was the Book of Hosea; the ones that came later—Jeremiah, Daniel, and the others—were missing. “That would fit in with the chronology...” Yitzhak mused aloud. “The Assyrians overran the Kingdom of Israel shortly afterwards...”

“And dispersed the People.” The rabbi completed. “But Sambatyon took pity on us...the Tribe of Zevulun, and delivered us here until others...including the Romans...came.”

"But what of the other Tribes? And did this Sambatyon bring the Romans here as well? And these books that come later..." Shalev inquired.

Shrugging his shoulders, Rabbi Ashkel responded, "We do not know the fate of the Others. As for the Romans...they came much later." Shaking his head, the old man narrated, "They quickly conquered us with their legions. We had not known war for generations." Chuckling ironically, the teacher amended, "Not that we were totally peaceful. We had fights and murders and more than enough violence...but wars? No. There was plenty of space...and we were the only ones here...or we thought we were...until the Romans came."

"And Sambatyon?" Yitzhak further probed.

"The Book of the Second Exodus merely states that he says that one day we will be reunited with our kin." A hopeful look appeared on the old man's face as he proclaimed, "And that day has come at last."

"Ah...my dear...come in!" Elabrius called out as he arose from a plush divan. As he took in the exotic Deltan woman, now wearing a skin-tight, low-cut dress that wonderfully accentuated her curves and her cleavage, a leer crossed the proconsul's face. "You look much better now." Gesturing with one hand at the divan, Elabrius invited, "Sit down...sit down." Snapping his fingers as Anara sat down near the edge of the luxurious velvet upholstered couch, the proconsul ordered, "Marius! Bring us food and drink—and hurry you lazy oaf or you'll be back scrubbing toilets." Shaking his head, Elabrius remarked with a sigh, "It's getting where you can't get a decent day's work out of a slave anymore."

"I wonder why..." Anara riposted with just the faintest hint of sarcasm in her voice.

Choosing to ignore the bite in his guest's words, the proconsul first addressed the guards who had brought her to him, "Stand guard outside the door until I call for you." Turning his attention back to Anara, Elabrius answered her quip with one of his own, "Because they're fools." Pouring wine into two goblets, the proconsul handed one to his guest as he sat down next to her on the sofa. "Drink." He commanded, the lecherous grin still on his face. Noting the lovely woman's hesitation, the Roman official chuckled as he took a sip, "My dear, I'd hardly ruin either this most excellent wine—or these fine dishes..." he joked as he waved his hand at the food placed on the table before them, "...with

something as vulgar as poison. Besides..." he added, all traces of humor vanished from his face and voice, "...if I wanted you dead, you and your friends would be dead."

"Point taken." Anara responded as her empathic senses picked up on the earnestness behind his words. Taking a sip of her wine, the Deltan first officer found it pleasing to her palate. "Not bad." She commented, "I've had much worse." Resting the goblet on her lap as she held it in her right hand, Anara, seeing an opportunity to buy that precious time she knew that both Chris and the *Perseus* needed, exhaled, subtly drawing the proconsul's gaze to her chest as she asked, "Why did you ask me to come here?"

His heart beating faster as he licked his lips, the proconsul replied as he picked out what appeared to be a deviled egg from a platter on the table, "We have much to talk about, my dear. But first...we eat and drink. Only a barbarian would discuss business on an empty stomach."

As she picked at her food, Anara listened quietly to the proconsul as he extolled the glories and virtues of the Empire. "You see, my dear..." Elabrius grinned, "...we have no war. The Pax has ruled for millennia. Can your people... as advanced as they are...say the same?"

"No." Anara answered truthfully as images of the Klingon War, the Dominion War, and the Cardassian insurgency flashed through her mind.

"I thought as much." Elabrius replied triumphantly before posing another question to his lovely dinner 'companion'. "Do you know the reason for our long peace?"

"No..." Anara drawled, thinking inwardly, *But I'm sure you're going to tell me.*

"It's because of the stability of our traditions." The proconsul answered back with an earnestness that momentarily took the Deltan woman aback. "Our society has remained essentially the same since the founding of the Empire. The Games strengthen us...inure to pain and death. Our gods give us a direct continuity to our ancestors in a way that you could never even hope to understand."

"What of the Children of the Son?" Anara ventured as she took a slight sip from her wine. "They don't worship your gods..."

Shaking his head, Elabrius replied, “No they don’t. But...before your people came over a hundred years ago, they were manageable.”

“I thought their sect was growing at the time...”

“Not really...” Elabrius denied, Anara’s empathic senses immediately telling her that she had struck a nerve, “Yes...” he reluctantly admitted on seeing the skeptical look on his prisoner’s face, “...their numbers were increasing, but we had the situation under control.” His gaze turning accusatory, he declared to his ‘guest’, “It was your people’s interference that brought about the increased militancy of the Son worshippers—the Children of Flavius...Valeria Tiberia and her movement...” Standing up, he walked over to his desk. Retrieving a sheaf of documents from his top drawer, he returned to the woman sitting on the couch and dropped the papers before her, “Your people brought these with them. To sap our will and divide us so that you could come in and conquer us later.”

Anara’s eyebrows rose as she perused the documents: books of the New Testament, including the book of Revelation; fragments of the US Constitution, the Fundamental Declarations of the Martian Colonies, and the writings of Surak; a passage from the Deltan philosopher Ranal extolling the virtues of free and unconditional love; and many other works. “I’m surprised you allowed the survivors to keep these...” Anara began only to be cut off by her captor.

“We did find and confiscate them. But when the others...” the proconsul spat out, “...the ones that came after the first group...escaped, the documents had disappeared. I have my ideas as to who stole them...” Elabrius declared before returning to the subject, “A short time later, mimeographed and printed copies of them began showing up in various places and soon after that, the New Covenanters and Children of Flavius made their first appearance. So you see...” the Roman dignitary finished, “...you are responsible.”

“If what you are saying is true...” Anara inquired, “...what do you expect us to do about it?”

“The Empire must have unity.” The proconsul declared, “Not just physical unity, but also emotional and spiritual unity. We cannot have that with the discordant voices you have introduced. The reforms the rebels insist on will tear the empire apart. To allow them free worship...to put an end to the contests to the death in the arena...”

"I don't have any problems with those reforms." Anara interjected.

"Of course you wouldn't." The proconsul riposted, "Because they would fit into your plans to infiltrate and eventually dominate our society by destroying its culture. Allowing the Son worshippers to openly preach their doctrine would encourage dissidence, while ending the gladiatorial games would sap the strength and will of the people—making us ripe for conquest. I will not permit this to happen." Elabrius declared forcefully. "You and your people will help me put an end to this cancer you have brought to us and then you will depart, never to return."

"We will not help you commit mass murder." Anara quickly responded as she rose to her feet.

"I didn't say anything about mass murder." The proconsul answered back, his smile returning. "I want you to provide me the tools I need to maintain the Empire and to ensure that more like you don't come back. If you do that..." he tempted, honeying his words, "When you depart, you may take the surviving descendents and Son worshippers with you and good riddance to you all."

"But there are so many..." The Deltan first officer protested, "You said so yourself..."

"That's not my problem." Elabrius replied coolly. "Any deviants remaining after I have ascended the throne and you have left will be purged from our society—one way or the other."

"Surely there's another option?" Anara proposed, "Maybe I can act as a mediator between you and the rebel leaders? Perhaps reach a compromise."

"No." The proconsul answered back, shaking his head as he spoke in a clear, decisive tone, "There will be no compromises...no mediations. You will comply with my demands or your friends and the other hostages will be executed. You're a lovely creature..." he stammered as he gazed upon the woman seated before him. Recovering his thoughts, he continued, "...but I will not be swayed." Pressing a button, the proconsul signaled the guards to return. "Take her back to her cell." Turning his attention back to Anara, he concluded, a grim smile on his lips, "You have six hours to consider my proposal. If you do not answer in the affirmative by then, you and the other prisoners will be executed along with all other Son worshippers and Descendents. I didn't start this insurrection—but one way or the other, I will finish it."

"I have to get back to my friends, Rabbi..." Yitzhak stated politely as he rose from his seat. "They need to know about this."

"Of course...of course...young man." Rabbi Ashkel replied, nodding his head repeatedly. "Avram will take you to a place of safety where you can wait for Valeria Tiberia's people to take you where you need to go. And don't worry about the little one here..." he smiled as his wife fussed over Margaret, wiping the little toddler's face with a wash rag, "...we'll look after her and see to it that she gets back to her parents as soon as possible. One other thing..." the old man said as he once again presented the relic to the young helmsman, "...take it."

"I can't." Yitzhak replied, shaking his head, "It belongs to you."

"If it stays with us, it does no one any good." The rabbi insisted, pressing the object into the younger man's hands. "With you...maybe something can be done with it. Please..."

Solemnly taking the covered disc, Lieutenant Shalev declared, "I'll do the best I can."

"That's all one can ask." The old man replied with a paternal grin as he turned towards the man standing next to Yitzhak. "Go now, Avram. And be careful—the soldiers and lictors are everywhere. *Shalom...Bracha vehazlaha.*"

PART 5

Creeping through the narrow alleyway, Shalev sidestepped quickly to avoid a small furry animal, resembling a cat more than anything else the young helmsman thought. His heart freezing as the creature let out a howl, both he and his guide froze in place, silently listening for the tell-tale sound of boots striking the pavement. Hearing nothing but the normal nighttime noises, the pair, in unison, let out a sigh of relief.

"That scared the hell out of me." Yitzhak gasped, taking a deep breath.

"Damned *felis*!" Avram cursed. "Probably a stray—they root through the garbage. We better move or a patrol's going to catch us."

"I hear you." Shalev replied as the pair made their way to the alley.

"We're clear." Avram announced as he surveyed the street. "Move!"

However, as the pair crossed the street, they heard a shout, "Halt!"

"Damn!" Yitzhak swore he saw four soldiers race towards them. "They must have come from that blind corner." Passing the relic into Avram's hands, the Starfleet officer instructed, "Duck back into the alley and run. Get this to Captain Hobson."

"What about you?" Shalev's guide asked as he took the package in his hand.

"I'll buy us some time—but go. Now!" Yitzhak commanded as the soldiers drew closer.

"Good luck!" Avram replied as he darted back into the dark alley.

Taking a deep breath, Yitzhak advanced slowly towards the soldiers, arms up and hands open, palms facing the four men who now had their submachineguns leveled at the young man. "I'm sorry...I know it's after curfew..." Yitzhak began, his lips turned up into a smile, "...but my *felis* got out..."

Before he could say another word, Yitzhak's head jerked as the butt of one of the soldier's SMGs impacted on his cheek, sending the hapless Shalev to the ground. "What was that for?" He croaked, gingerly touching his cheek as he

got up to his knees.

“Stay where you are.” The soldier who struck him commanded as he pointed his weapon at the helmsman’s head. Another soldier, shuffling through a sheaf of papers, nodded his head as he handed one of the papers to the soldier standing beside the man threatening Yitzhak.

“Looks like we just earned ourselves a night at Scylla’s, boys! We’ve just caught ourselves a barbarian.” The man called out with glee. Looking down on Shalev, the sergeant ordered, “Get him on his feet and cuff him. The Proconsul will be pleased when he sees this one.”

“They have?” Proconsul Elabrius exclaimed into the phone. “No. Prep him for the Arena. I think we’ve found our Pro-Am bout for tonight’s Games of the Week.” Smirking, he further ordered, “And have our barbarian female brought there as well—as my guest.”

“Valeria!” Junius burst in, accompanied by another man.

Turning about rapidly, the rebel leader responded quickly, “What is it, Junius? Was there a problem picking up the captain’s man?”

“Yes.” The dark haired man replied through clenched teeth as his hand went to the other man’s shoulder. Addressing his words as much to Hobson as to his leader, Junius explained, “Avram and your friend had almost made it to the meeting point when they were spotted by a patrol.”

“Yitzhak bought me the time to get away.” Avram interrupted; an apologetic look on his face. “He pushed me back into the alley and told me to run—that he’d buy me time.” Producing the shiny disk, the youth finished, “He said that this might be important and that it had to get to you.”

Taking the disk, the steely-eyed starship captain carefully examined it, noticing at once that it seemed to be a perfect fit for the slot in the device that Valeria had given him earlier. “Thank you.” Chris acknowledged and then turned towards Valeria, “If what’s on this disk is what I think is on it...” he declared, “...then a lot of questions are probably going to be answered.”

“What do we do about Yitzhak?” T’Pren interjected, her face reflecting her concern for the young helmsman, “Not to mention Anara and the others.”

“We rescue them.” Chris replied assertively, “And I think I now know a way.” Addressing Valeria, the captain instructed, “Have your media people and your fighters stand by.” Tapping his comm badge, the captain called out, “Mr. Miller?”

“Aye, Captain.” The *Perseus* second officer responded.

“Inform the senior staff that there will be a conference call in two hours. We’re getting our people back.”

Catching himself as the guards pushed him into the small jail cell, Yitzhak narrowly avoided stumbling. Looking about, he saw three men, two occupying the two cots and a third sitting on the cement floor.

“Newcomers take the floor.” One of the men on the bunk, sporting a week’s growth of beard, pronounced as he pointed towards an open space on the far wall. “What’s your name?”

“Yitzhak.” The *Perseus*’s helmsman replied, “Yitzhak Shalev.”

“A Child of Isaac.” The bald man lying on the other bed declared disdainfully.

“Want to make something of it?” Yitzhak snapped back, slipping into a combat stance as the other man rose to his feet, his fists balled.

“Calm down!” The first man commanded, “You’ll both be doing plenty of fighting soon enough.” As the other man settled back down on his cot, the first man answered Yitzhak’s unspoken question. “This is a holding pen for the Games. We...” he explained, pointing to himself and the younger man on the floor, “...belong to Valeria Tiberia’s group.”

“What about him?” Yitzhak inquired, jerking his head towards the other man.

“I’m not a godsdamned rebel!” Baldy spat out. “I was sentenced to the games for killing a lictor in a brawl.”

"They like to throw us in with the common criminals." The first man explained, ignoring Baldy's glare. "I think the guards like to place bets on what happens in the cells—who kills whom...who rapes whom...and so on. As long as we outnumber the ones like him..." he said as he jerked his thumb at the bald man, "...there usually isn't any problems. It's when they throw only one of us in a cell with half a dozen or so convicts..."

"I get the picture." Yitzhak interjected. "So...what's your name?"

"My name is Marcus." The bearded man replied, "And this..." he continued, nodding his head at the teenager on the floor, "...is my son, Gaius."

Recalling those names, Yitzhak asked, "You wouldn't happen to have a wife named Camilla, would you? And two daughters—Julia and Margaret and..."

"You've seen my wife?" Marcus asked anxiously as Gaius looked up in astonishment.

"Mother?" The young teenager interjected excitedly, "Is she all right?"

"How are they?" Marcus pleaded as his eyes and face reflected the fears flooding the man's mind.

"When I saw them last, they were alive, but..."

"But?" The anxious father interrupted as he got up off his cot, "Tell me what happened!"

"They were captured by the Romans." Yitzhak answered back, his voice softening. "Along with my friend. We made it to Valeria Tiberia's headquarters, but the Romans found out...the old woman..."

"Antonia." Marcus growled, "My mother-in-law is set in her ways."

"And afraid..." Shalev added, Marcus nodding his head.

"Very much so." The bearded man agreed.

"They were captured, but I and Margaret managed to get away." Yitzhak began only to again be cut off by the concerned father.

"Margaret's safe?" He asked, a note of hope in his voice.

"Yes." Yitzhak answered back, glad to be the bearer of at least some good news. "She's with the Children of Isaac."

"Good." Marcus sighed in relief, "That's something at least..."

"However, before he could say anything else, four guards appeared at the cage entrance. "You!" One of the guards ordered, pointing to Shalev. "With us." His lips turning up into an evil grin, he taunted, "You'll be pleased to know that you're on tonight's card. You're going to face Marius."

"Marius!" Baldy chortled. "The Eastern Province champion! This won't last long." Calling out to one of the guards, the prisoner requested, "Put me down for 30 denarii that he doesn't make it past the first round."

"You're on, Lineus." The guard replied with a laugh as he gestured with his SMG at Shalev. "Now...move. You're on in sixty minutes."

As the trio entered Valeria's private office/quarters, T'Pren closed the door behind her. Watching as her captain set the recording device on the rebel leader's desk, the young Vulcan security officer enquired, "Sir? What are we going to do about Commander Rysyl and the others?"

"Soon, Lieutenant." Hobson replied as he slipped the disk into the device. "First I want to be sure that what's on this disk matches what I've learned so far."

"You mean from the book?" Valeria interjected.

"Right." Chris responded as a three dimensional holographic image of a young man with locks of golden hair and wearing what appeared to be a white tunic appeared above the desk.

"What..." Valeria gasped.

"What you see is not my true form." The image announced, "It is only an image drawn from a composite of your cultures. I appear this way so that you may more easily relate to me. If you are viewing this projection, then your civilization has progressed to the point where it is now ready for the

information you are about to receive. Know that you are not of this world, my children. You were brought here, to this place of refuge that is so much like your own home, by us, in a misguided effort to preserve your species. We rescued your ancestors from disaster in the hope that you—their descendents—might be spared what we...in our arrogance...thought to be your inevitable destruction one day by your own hand. We...I...in our smugness failed you. I am so very sorry, my children...so very sorry..."

As Valeria, along with the two Starfleet officers listened quietly to the message, the rebel leader shook her head sadly

"This supports what I read from the book." Chris commented in his usual patrician voice. Turning towards Valeria, he explained, "Your ancestors were taken in at least two different groups. The first group...the Children of Isaac...in roughly the seventh century BCE, and the second group from survivors of the volcanic eruptions at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

"But how could that be, sir?" T'Pren interjected.

"The events of the eruption and afterwards are confused." The starship commander and amateur classical scholar replied, "The only eyewitness account of the events to survive comes from Pliny the Younger and he wrote his account twenty-five years after the fact. The eruption covered a wide area and was in a state of anarchy for several days afterwards, so it would not be totally unreasonable for some survivors to be transported away." Pausing for a moment in thought, Chris mused, "This might also explain other disappearances such as that of the IXth Hispania...although..." he qualified, "...other sources state that the legion was disbanded..."

"So..." Valeria interrupted as she pointed at the device, "What you're telling me is that we...all of us...were brought here by...?"

"By whomever these beings are..." Chris completed, nodding his head, "Yes."

Shaking her head, Valeria remarked, "So...we're all barbarians too."

"In a word..." Hobson deadpanned, "Yes."

"After listening to this..." The chestnut haired woman shook her head, "The people have a right to know."

Giving the rebel leader an appraising look, the starship captain inquired in a

voice fraught with meaning, “Are you sure you want this particular Pandora’s Box opened? You might not be ready.”

Holding her head erect, Valeria gazed unblinking into Hobson’s steely gray eyes. “Maybe...maybe not. But this is a part of our heritage...of who we are. The people have a right to make up their own minds.”

“I can’t argue with that.” Chris sighed as T’Pren cleared her throat.

“Starfleet Command might not see it that way, sir.”

“That’s something I’ll have to face when the time comes, Lieutenant.” Hobson replied in a grave voice as he tapped his comm badge.

“Captain? This is Miller.”

“Are all the senior officers present, Commander?”

“Yes, Sir.” The operations officer replied.

“Good. This is how we will proceed...” Calmly, the stone-faced captain outlined his scheme in exacting detail. Turning to Valeria, he then asked, “Can you do what needs to be done from your end?”

“Yes...no problem.” The lovely rebel replied, “But...I can’t guarantee how it’ll turn out. The people might not respond the way we want them to.”

“It is a risk...” The starship captain confessed, “But one that we have to take.”

“Sir?” Commander Miller inquired after his captain had spoken, “Are you sure about this? We’re coming dangerously close to crossing the bounds of the Prime Directive—some might say that we are crossing them.”

“I know.” Hobson acknowledged in a clipped tone, “And I will take full responsibility when and if a board of inquiry is held. You have your orders, Mr. Miller. We move in one hour.”

“You heard the Captain.” Lieutenant Commander Miller growled as the *Perseus*’s captain ended his transmission. “Let’s do this.” Turning to the buxom chief engineer, the dark-skinned second officer inquired, “Will you

have everything ready from your end, Mr. Barrows?"

"We'll be ready, sir." The blonde engineer replied in the southwestern US accent common to those coming from the planet North Star. "They'll never know what hit 'em."

"Good." Miller nodded his head, "Start the clock. We have fifty-nine minutes." Watching as the officers filed out of the ready room, the lieutenant commander waited until the door slid shut behind the last one before speaking. "Computer...I want a secure channel to the following subspace address." He then recited a series of numbers. "Following this conversation you are to delete all records of this communication. Authorization code Omega Omega Triad."

"Authorization code confirmed." The computer responded. "Subspace link established."

Nodding his head respectfully at the stone faced man appearing on the screen, Miller stated simply, "Mr. Jones."

"You have something to report, Mr. Miller?" The man inquired in a flat, cold voice.

"Yes, sir." The operations officer replied as he launched into his report.

Several minutes later, the man known simply as Jones responded, "Thank you Mr. Miller. What you've told me is most interesting. For now, continue to follow orders and remain observant. No reason why we shouldn't let Captain Hobson and his people do the heavy lifting for us. You've done well. Keep up the good work and we'll see about turning what we talked about a few months ago into an actuality."

PART 6

Escorted into the ornate chamber by Elabrius and one of his aides, Anara took the seat next to the proconsul's dais at his instructions. "I think you will find this interesting my dear." He remarked as the Deltan woman took note of the commotion surrounding her. Seated in one of the luxury sky boxes of what was obviously a stadium, the *Perseus's* first officer saw spectators of all ages filing into the seats carrying drinks and food as well as various noisemakers.

"Why have you brought me here?" Anara asked.

"As I said earlier, you might be interested in tonight's entertainment." The proconsul declared with a fat grin as an attendant brought both of them wine.

"And why would I be interested in watching this 'spectacle'?" The Deltan woman responded, her voice dripping with disdain as she reluctantly took a sip from her goblet.

"I think..." Elabrius gloated, pointing to a television monitor on the far wall as the crowd in the stands stood for the fanfare to the current Caesar, "...you'll find one of the contestants to be of interest to you."

Watching the monitor, a gasp escaped the Deltan first officer as she saw Yitzhak, her helmsman, wearing a leather kilt and metal skullcap and carrying a short sword and a small round shield, being escorted into the arena by two men wearing ancient Roman military dress, each carrying the traditional Roman javelin better known as a *pilum*. From the opposite end of the arena, a man wearing a leather studded breastplate, leather kilt, plumed helmet, and carrying an oval shield and short sword. As the two contestants drew closer to the center of the arena, the announcer's voice blared out from the P. A. System...

"This is Gaius Livinius and you're watching the Games of the Week live on the Imperial Broadcasting Network. Sitting next to me and providing color commentary is Lucius Marcellus, retired Golden Gladius champion retiarus. Our first bout tonight is a Pro-Am spectacular with Marius, the Eastern Province champion..." the announcer paused for several moments to allow the crowd to express itself in thunderous applause, *"... taking on the newcomer, a Child of Isaac and rebel against the Empire, Yitzhak Shalev."* Pausing again as the audience booed a grim faced Yitzhak, the announcer turned to his colleague, *"Well, Lucius, the odds-makers are handicapping this fight as 10-1 in favor of*

Marius, what do you think?"

"That sounds about right, Gaius. Marius is an expert at close in blade work—remember his championship bout against Agricola? He's also pretty good with the shield bash. But we shouldn't completely count out the newcomer. He looks lean and wiry, and his people have a reputation for being savage fighters when cornered. I look for a well-fought bout tonight—but..." he concluded with a chuckle, "...I'd put my money on Marius."

"There you have it, Arena fans. Now, hurry up and get your wagers in because the fight is about to commence!"

"Right." Captain Christopher Hobson declared as his eyes took in Valeria, T'Pren, and the rest of the resistance fighters gathered in the catacombs, all cradling their weapons and looking back at him with a mixture of enthusiasm and fear. "This will be a two pronged attack. Our objective is to infiltrate the palace compound. The first group will be with me and will consist of myself, Valeria, and T'Pren. We will move to secure the broadcasting facilities—and—if all goes well, the Proconsul. The second team, led by Avram..." Chris continued in a clear patrician tone, "Will carry out a rescue of our people"

Responding to this portion of Hobson's plan with a snort, Bradleius called out derisively, "How? By letting them kill us—or becoming prisoners ourselves? There's too many of them—it's suicide."

"Not if you keep to the plan." Valeria interjected before the starship captain could reply. "Besides..." she added in a cheerful tone, "...we have help for a change."

"What do you mean?" Junius asked as he addressed the captain, "Are your people going to give us weapons or extra men?"

"No." Valeria once again interrupted. "This is our world—our fight. Captain Hobson..." she explained, giving the starship captain a polite nod of her head, "...understands and respects this. If we're going to do this—if we're deserving of our liberty and freedom—then we have to be willing to fight for it. We can't always be dependent on the generosity of others." Taking a deep breath, she concluded her speech, "Now...if there's anyone who wants to sit this one out, you may do so..." Sighing in relief as no one took her up on her offer, the rebel leader ceded the platform back to the man standing next to her.

As the fighters made their final equipment checks, Chris whispered into Valeria's ear, "Nicely done."

"I'm sorry if I stepped on your toes." The lovely rebel replied, also speaking in a low voice.

"Not at all." Chris averred. "You said the right words at the right time. It was especially important that they came from you and not me. I'm also glad that you understand that we have to keep my people's involvement in what is to come absolutely secret."

"Completely." Valeria responded. "No one will ever know from me what your vessel in orbit is about to do for us."

"Good." Chris answered back with a slight smile as T'Pren tapped him on the shoulder.

"Sir? Everyone's ready."

"Excellent." The captain replied with a nod of his head, "Let's go."

"Why are you doing this?" Anara protested to the proconsul, watching in horror as the young helmsman whom she had just recently gotten to know and his opponent prepared to do battle. "You promised..."

"I promised you nothing, my dear." The proconsul replied, his heart once again racing at the close contact with the alien woman. "Until you cooperate. I'm not an unreasonable man, though. I can...and will...call off the bout. That is..." he grinned slyly, "If you're willing to meet my terms right now."

"And if I don't?" Anara asked.

"Then the fight continues and in four hours I will execute the hostages."

"And what if Shalev lives?" Anara ventured.

Laughing, Elabrius responded, "If your man wins this bout, I'll be out a hundred solidi." His laughter vanishing as suddenly as it appeared, the

proconsul continued, "If he wins, then, he'll be our featured guest for the program following this one. A popular broadcast called *Hercules' Labors* based loosely on the myth." His cruel smile returning, the Roman explained, "He'll have to survive twelve contests—if he wins them all, my word as a Roman, he'll gain his freedom. But I must tell you—no one has ever survived all twelve challenges." Pausing for a moment for his words to sink in, Elabrius insisted, "So...do you accede to my demands?"

Knowing that Chris was still free, Anara took a deep breath and answered back with a single word, "No."

"Then let the Games commence!" Elabrius exclaimed, officially announcing the beginning of the fight.

"And with those words from our Proconsul, the fight officially begins! Marius is approaching cautiously...he's no hurry..."

"He's just feeling out his prey, Gaius." The former gladiator providing color commentary interjected, "Amateurs tend to either rush in or back off real quick. Either way, they usually end up stumbling, providing the perfect opening for a quick ending."

"About the size of a Nausicaan sword, but I have to remember that it's double edged..." Shalev muttered to himself as he saw his opponent approaching, "...and that it can slash as well as stab." Feeling the weight of the shield on his arm, Yitzhak's lips turned up into a sly grin as he removed it, receiving a surprised gasp from the audience in response.

"Well now, that's unusual Lucius. Any reason why he'd do that?"

"Well...a buckler is difficult to use for someone unskilled..." the ex-champion opined, "...but why hasn't he discarded it? Unless..."

Seeing his opening, as the hulking figure before him raised up just enough from his crouch, Yitzhak, tossing the buckler at his foe like a discus, rushed his opponent as the tiny shield impacted with the top of the oval shield, leaving his opponent's legs temporarily exposed.

"Mars damned!" The color commentator exclaimed, "This man can't be an amateur! I've only seen that maneuver done three times—and only by the most

experienced pros!"

"Just listen to that crowd!" The announcer called out as the audience cheered the unusual and bold move. "They love it! And now...I don't believe it! The newcomer's sidestepped...he's sliding. A back-slice to the Achilles tendon as he slid past! And Marius is on the ground!"

"An improvised variation of the Demetrian Slide followed up by a makeshift Cornelian back slash!" The former gladiator exclaimed. "That was totally unexpected—especially for an amateur."

"The crowd loves it when an underdog pulls off an upset and this is definitely one for the books!"

"You're right, Gaius. They'll be talking about this for some time."

The cheers of the crowd dies down as everyone awaits the Proconsul's decision. Will he spare the life of the EasternProvince champion or will it be thumbs down? The decision after this message from our sponsors!

"After an exciting afternoon at the Arena, ride home in style with the top down in our new Mercury Aquila convertible..."

A chagrined look on his face, Elabrius glared at his prisoner.

"What?" Anara said, matching her captor glare for glare, "You expected him to die without putting up a fight?"

"None of those from the first group showed anywhere near this sort of ability." The proconsul declared as he gazed down on the arena, "Not even the ones that came after—with one exception—showed any real prowess."

"Then you need to rethink your history." The Deltan woman replied with just a trace of smugness, "Because ours tells us that they did everything they could to avoid harming or killing your people—and it wasn't easy for them to restrain themselves either."

"That just affirms the fact that you are weak." Elabrius countered as the commercials played on the television screen.

"What you see as weakness...we see as strength." Anara rebutted. "Time passes for us as well as it does for you. Just as you have changed...so have we. We've been through wars so horrible that you can't even imagine them—our very existence threatened. All of that has made us see that life is all the more precious a commodity...one not to be squandered or wasted foolishly."

"We'll see about that." The proconsul answered back grimly as his assistant signaled him that the commercial break was ending.

A drop-dead gorgeous raven-haired model appeared on the screen wearing a gold belly dancers top and bottom surrounded by several tanned, well-muscled, bare-chested Adonises wearing gladiators' outfits. *"I'm Messalina and all my men wear Aqua Virilis..."* she winked, *"...or they wear nothing at all!"*

"And we're back! Will it be life...or death...for the fallen Marcus? The Proconsul is standing...he's raising his hand...and it's...it's thumbs down for the former champion!"

"That's the way it goes in the Arena, Gaius." Lucius declared fatalistically, "Marius was a brave and gallant champion—I had the pleasure of fighting by his side on more than one occasion, but...as the traditional salutation and the gladiator code goes—We who are about to die...salute you."

"And now the crowd waits in stunned silence as the newcomer, Yitzhak Shalev, prepares to make his first Arena kill."

"The first of many, I'll wager." The color commentator remarked, "The contests only get harder from here, but I have a feeling this young man will be up to the challenge."

Images flashed in and out of the young helmsman's mind as he held the bloody sword in his hand. Dead and dying crewmates from the Marlin...the wounded called out to him as he hid in a Jeffries tube from the Jem'Hadar who stabbed down with their bayonets at both the living and the dead. Clutching his bleeding side, Yitzhak bit his lip to keep from crying out in pain as the Jem'Hadar passed him by. All except for one who remained behind, his back turned to him. Seeing his opportunity, the native of Eretz Israel struck, stabbing the small of the back of the Dominion soldier, twisting the blade as he vented his fury and rage.

His mind returning to the present, Shalev looked down on his fallen foe; his

eyes looking up to him in a mix of fear and anticipation. Crying out, Yitzhak thrust the blade down, stabbing into the earthen arena mere centimeters from his fallen foe's head. "No!" He yelled up at the darkened skybox. "You'll have to get your thrills from someone else you sick son of a bitch! I'm not going to do it!" With that, he turned and walked back the way he came. While many in the crowd, once they realized what the victor had done, began to boo, a sizable proportion, much to the surprise of the Proconsul, began to cheer, their cheers growing louder and louder as Yitzhak approached where his guards stood waiting.

"Why are they cheering?" The proconsul mused aloud, "The man turned lily-livered."

"Maybe it's because they're beginning to see something you refuse to see." Anara opined, "Maybe they're beginning to realize that there's strength in not killing."

His face reddening in anger, Elabrius barked out, pointing his finger at his Deltan prisoner, "Take her back to her cell—at once!"

"What about him?" The proconsul's aide inquired as he pointed at the retreating Yitzhak.

"He's to appear on the next broadcast of *Hercules' Labors*." The Roman official declared, adding in a menacing tone as he made his way towards the door, "And I expect him to fail—and fail most humiliatingly."

"Here." Valeria whispered, halting the group at the base of an ancient rock-hewn stairway. "There's a trapdoor at the top of these stairs. It leads directly into the sewers that will take us to the palace."

"I'm surprised this place isn't guarded." T'Pren noted.

"Why should they bother?" The rebel leader replied, "No one living has been down here for centuries. As far as they're concerned, the only things down here are rodents and ghosts."

"Right." Hobson acknowledged, "Let's move—*tempus fugit*."

PART 7

"This way." The guard escorting Anara ordered as pointed with his SMG down the corridor to the cells. Her empathic senses picking up on her escort's growing emotional tumult as her eyes noted the beads of sweat on his forehead and his somewhat heavier breathing, the Deltan woman, perspiring herself from the lack of air-conditioning in the confined corridor flashed a quick, seductive smile as she spoke in a low voice, forcing the man to come even closer to her than he already was.

"Can we pause for just a moment? Please? I just need to catch my breath. It's hotter here than I'm used to."

"Very well." The guard agreed as Anara made a production of daubing the sweat off her chest. "I wish there was a cool place where we could sit down for just a moment before I go back into the sweltering cell of mine."

Looking up and down the corridor and detecting no one else, the guard crooked his finger, "Here. There's a break-room just down the hall. It's air conditioned. I don't think it'll hurt anyone if we take five minutes or so..."

"Thanks!" The Deltan woman smiled back, "I owe you one."

"I'm sure between the two of us we can think of a way that you can pay me back." The guard flashed a brief leer as he led his prisoner into the empty room.

As she entered the room, Anara instantly felt the cool breeze coming from the wall unit opposite the door. Next to the air-conditioner, a white refrigerator stood and next to that was a counter with a sink. Noticing the small tables with magazines and glasses on them as well as the couch and television set, the Deltan woman raised an eyebrow, "You sure no one else is liable to walk in?"

A smirk on his face as he locked the door, the guard replied, "I'm sure. The next shift doesn't report in for another fifteen minutes. More than enough time..." He remarked as he beckoned his prisoner to the couch.

"Hmmm...Just perfect..." Anara smiled back, slipping off her panties. "Just stay there..." she purred as she unbuttoned the guard's trousers, "Let me do all the work..."

“Had him and let him go!” The guard growled as he pushed Yitzhak back into his cell. “What’s the matter? No *testes*?”

Remaining silent through the guard’s taunts, Lieutenant Shalev ignored the glares coming from Baldy who groused to the other guard, “You mean I’m still out thirty denarii even though this coward didn’t make the kill?”

“Afraid so!” The guard laughed, “It still goes on the books as a loss for Marius...although...” the guard provided helpfully, “...you might be able to get a partial refund—the commission’s reviewing the fight.”

“Well...that’s something at least.” Baldy scowled. Making as if he was about to lunge at the Starfleet officer, the convict brought himself up short as he saw that the other prisoners in the room, led by the dark haired Child of Flavius, Marcus, got up as well, ready to interpose themselves between the two. Sinking back on to his couch, Baldy muttered to himself as Marcus regarded Yitzhak, nodding his head approvingly.

“You’re the talk of cells here.” The dark haired man remarked, “Took a lot of courage—and restraint—for you to spare that man’s life.” Lowering his head, Marcus confessed, “I wish I had that strength. The first time I went out there and the Proconsul gave the signal...”

“Hey...” Yitzhak interjected, placing his hand on the other man’s shoulder, “Don’t blame yourself.” Sighing, Shalev admitted, “I nearly did it. The audience cheering...the adrenaline...it was all I could do...”

Before the young Eretz Israel native could utter another word, the sounds of gunfire and shouting reverberated through the cell block.

“What the?” One of the prisoners exclaimed as Yitzhak shouted...

“Get down!”

Diving to the floor, a hail of bullets barely missed the prisoners—all except for Baldy who, too slow to obey the Starfleet officer’s call, was cut down by several rounds. Glancing up from the floor, Shalev saw the guard who had fired on them slip a new magazine into his weapon. However, before he could

cock the SMG, a single shot rang out, followed immediately after by the guard's head exploding in a red mist. Smiling in relief as he recognized the man who had just gunned down the guard, Yitzhak called out...

"Avram! Am I glad to see you!"

"Just a second, Yitzhak." The Child of Isaac replied, "I'll have you out of there. Stand back." He warned as he approached, pointing his gun at the lock on the cell door. Waiting until all the prisoners had cleared out of the line of fire, Avram fired, breaking the lock and opening the cell door.

Walking out ahead of the others, Yitzhak motioned for Marcus to join him. "Avram...this is Marcus...Margaret's father."

"My daughter..." The dark-haired father entreated, "Is she..."

"Your daughter is safe and in good hands." Avram assured as he handed the dead guard's weapon to Yitzhak. "We have to move if we're going to make it in time to where they're holding your friend and the others."

"I'm going with you." Marcus declared as he picked up a pistol from another fallen soldier. "My wife and girls are prisoners there as well."

"All right." Avram agreed, "Come with us, then. You ready, Yitzhak?"

"Yeah." The helmsman replied as he cocked the unfamiliar weapon, "Let's go."

Signaling his group to halt as they reached the end of the hallway, Hobson motioned for Valeria to join him. Pointing at the door guarded by two soldiers, the starship captain gave the rebel leader a questioning look. Nodding her head, Valeria aimed her pistol at one of the guards. Putting his hand on the pistol and gently pushing it down, Chris drew his phaser, aiming it at one of the guards as T'Pren, crouched on the other side of her commanding officer, aimed hers at the other. Simultaneously beams of blue light lanced out, silently felling both of the guards.

"Are they dead?" Valeria asked, her mouth open in astonishment.

"No." Hobson answered back, shaking his head, "Merely stunned. We better move though."

“Right.” The chestnut haired woman replied, “The broadcasting studio’s behind those doors.”

Approaching the doors, Chris counted down with his fingers: Three...two...as his last finger dropped, T’Pren and Bradleius kicked down the doors. “Everyone down!” Valeria shouted as she and Hobson stormed in after their two teammates. “Now!” The rebel leader emphasized, firing her pistol at one of the security guards reaching for his weapon, striking him in this arm.

Motioning for T’Pren to tend to the wounded guard, Captain Hobson spoke out in a loud, clear voice, his patrician tone commanding instant attention, “Do as you’re told and no one will be hurt.” Pointing to one of the cameramen, the starship captain ordered, “You! I need you to man your camera.” Now addressing the other technicians, he further commanded, “The rest of you—take your positions. We’re going to make a broadcast.”

“Why bother?” One of the technicians yelled back with a derisive snort, “They’ll cut the power soon enough.”

“Just take your stations.” Chris replied with a slight grin, “And let me worry about that.” As the television crew reluctantly reassumed their positions, Chris tapped his comm badge. “Are you ready, Mr. Miller?”

“Whenever you give the order, sir. The atmospheric conditions have improved—there’ll be no problems implementing your instructions.” The operations officer responded and then, upon receiving a confirming nod from Treasure, currently standing by her bridge station, added. “Lieutenant Barrows is standing by as well.”

Watching as Valeria, carrying the silver data recorder reverently in her hands took the stage; Chris took a deep breath, “On my mark, Mr. Miller...”

Feeling the man beneath tense up and shudder as he climaxed, Anara, her hands around his neck, squeezed the pressure points behind his neck just as Varok had taught her years ago. Waiting just a moment until she was sure that her captor was unconscious, the Deltan woman retrieved the guard’s keys and weapon. Slipping her underpants back on, she apologized, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me. Sex should never be used as a weapon, but...necessity dictates.”

Pausing at the door, Anara, holding her ear to the door, listened for any sort of noise until she was satisfied that no one was there. Cautiously opening the door, the Deltan first officer stepped out into the empty corridor. "Have to hurry..." Anara muttered to herself as she made her way down the hallway towards the cellblock holding Rysyla and the others. "No telling how long the proconsul will wait before calling for me again."

"There seems to be a problem in the prisoner's wing, Proconsul." A tribune reported as he entered the proconsul's office.

"What sort of problem?" Elabrius replied with a grimace as he poured himself yet another glass of wine.

"We've lost communications with the gladiatorial wing, Sire. It looks like a slave revolt is in progress"

"Then send a cohort of soldiers crush it." The proconsul ordered with a growl, gulping down his wine. "You're supposed to be able to deal with situations like this. If you can't handle it, then I will find someone who can."

"It will be dealt with." The tribune answered back, saluting. "I will personally lead the cohort."

"See that you do." The proconsul responded as he turned on his television set. Addressing the legate seated across from him, Elabrius inquired, "And you, Legate...how is the campaign to root out the rebels progressing?"

"Our troops have combed the city looking for Valeria Tiberia and the rest of her rabble..." Legate Pompey reported, "...but she still remains at large."

"I expect to see her in chains by the end of the week." The Proconsul pronounced, "Or I will speak to the Emperor. A legate can be replaced as easily as a tribune."

"I trust..." An angry Pompey retorted as he rose to his feet, "That you are aware that the same can be said of a proconsul. Remember..." he warned as he leaned over the proconsul's desk until his face was only inches away from the other man's, "...I have the Emperor's ear as well." Having made his point, the general turned about and strode confidently out of the room, leaving a

chagrined Elabrius seated behind his desk, watching as he left. Waiting until the legate had left the room, the proconsul opened his desk drawer. Taking out a dagger, he slipped into a hidden sheath in his sleeve.

"This way!" Marcus pointed as Yitzhak and his team made their way towards the courtyard separating the male from female wings.

"Wait!" The young helmsman, smelling a trap, called out, placing a restraining hand on the impatient husband and father. "Look...up there!" He instructed, pointing at a balcony. "Those men up there have a clear field of fire—anyone moving out there's a dead man walking."

"So...what do we do?" Avram asked as he surveyed the courtyard. "We can't get a shot at those men from here...and there's no cover anywhere."

"We need something for a diversion..." Yitzhak muttered aloud as he scanned the area with his eyes. Spotting several fire extinguishers, he smirked, "Go back to the galley..." he ordered, speaking to one of the prisoners, "...and bring back all the vinegar and cellophane wrap that you can find." Approaching one of the fire extinguishers, he remarked to no one in particular, "Now...if these things use baking soda...we're in business." His lips turning up into a broad grin as he read the labeling, he quipped as the man he had sent returned with several bottles, "We're in business!"

"What do you mean?" Marcus asked, his curiosity aroused as he watched Shalev carefully open two of the fire extinguishers and then poured out their contents of baking soda from each. "What are you doing?"

"Baking soda plus vinegar equals instant smoke screen." The young helmsman replied as he wrapped the baking soda in the cellophane wrap. Taking a pair of empty fire extinguisher cylinders, he poured in the vinegar until there was only enough room in each for the wrapped baking soda. He then modified two of the other fire extinguishers, explaining as he tied them to the two extinguishers containing the baking soda-vinegar mixture, "I modified the other extinguishers to serve as makeshift rockets. They probably won't reach the balcony, but they don't have to. All they have to do is get to the center of the courtyard and I figure they'll do that much at least. The force of impact should..." Yitzhak crossed his fingers, "...cause the baking soda and vinegar to mix, setting everything off."

Shaking his head, Avram joked, “That or the guards up on that balcony will die laughing.”

“Either/or.” Yitzhak laughed as he aimed his makeshift missiles. “All right, people. If this works and we get smoke—take off and run like hell to the other side. Don’t even stop to shoot—your muzzle flashes will just give you away. And don’t forget to zigzag!” His lips moving in silent prayer, set off his Macgyvered devices, watching in satisfaction as they took off, tumbling awkwardly in the air before landing with a muffled whump.

“Now!” Yitzhak shouted as the courtyard filled with smoke, “Run!”

Hearing a soft thumping sound, Anara froze in place as she listened intently for the sound of running feet. Her ears picking up the sound of shouting, gunfire, and running feet approaching her, the Deltan woman quickly ducked into an empty room. Her heart beating rapidly, the *Perseus’s* first officer listened quietly.

“I can’t believe that worked!”

“Of course it did.” A familiar voice answered back. A smile coming to her lips, Anara opened the door.

“Wait!” Yitzhak’s voice called out as he cocked his weapons. “Someone’s in that room.”

“Lieutenant Shalev!” Anara called out.

“Commander?” The helmsman responded, “Is that you?”

“It’s me, Lieutenant. I’m coming out.” Slowly entering the corridor, Anara saw her shipmate with two other men.

“It’s good to see you, Ma’am.” The lieutenant declared with a smile on his face.

“It’s good to see you too.” The Deltan answered back with a grin of her own.

“My wife and daughters?” The dark-haired man standing next to Yitzhak asked, his voice carrying an edge to it. “Where are they?”

"This is Marcus." Shalev explained, "He's the husband and father of the women we found."

"You're Camilla's husband?" Anara asked. Seeing the man nod his head in response, the first officer announced, "I was on my way to them. We need to hurry—I'm not sure what the proconsul will do when he finds out I'm loose—he might decide to take it out on them."

"The proconsul is going to have a lot more to worry about soon." Avram declared as the men joined Anara. "Valeria Tiberia and the others of your people have probably taken the broadcasting station by now."

"Chris?" Anara exclaimed, a hopeful look on her face, "He's here?"

"He's here." Avram replied as Marcus glanced anxiously down the corridor.

Her empathic senses picking up on the husband's fears for his family, Anara, taking charge of the situation, commanded, "We better get going. The women's cells are this way."

"Now, Mr. Miller." Captain Hobson ordered as Valeria nodded her head.

"Mr. Barrows..." The *Perseus* operations officer ordered.

"She's on, sir..." The North Star native chief engineer grinned, "From coast to coast..."

Returning Valeria's head nod with one of his own, the starship captain watched silently as the young rebel spoke.

"People of Magna Roma...listen to me. Everything you have taught about us...about who we are and about the Empire...is a lie. The truth is both far more wonderful—and more frightening—than you can possibly imagine. Watch and learn!"

She then activated the player. Springing to life once again, the holographic image replayed its message, only this time, Valeria allowed it to play through to conclusion...

"Your people called me by a variety of names. Some called me Sambatyon,

others Mithras, others Mars or Mercury or Cupid and still others the Son. I am none of these. I am merely a being much like yourselves only from a people older than yours. Rightly or wrongly after transporting you here, for several of your lifetimes, I and my people used these names to try to mold and manipulate you—to prepare you for the challenges yet to come. We took the faiths that you possessed before we transported you and...used them...to encourage certain behaviors such as a desire for unity and harmony. It was only much later that we came to realize how wrong we were...

Picking up his phone as he watched the broadcast, Elabrius barked commands into the speaker, “I want that godsdamned signal jammed, now! What are you telling me? It can’t be jammed? That it’s airing world-wide and there’s nothing you can do to stop it?” Hanging up, the proconsul ignored the ring of outrage coming from the bell as he slammed the receiver back into its cradle. “Barbarians! It has to be the barbarians!” Punching the button on his intercom, the outraged proconsul ordered, “Tribune! I want Operation *Carthago* instituted immediately. The population of the city is to be decimated and the survivors sold as slaves. I also want the female barbarian and all of the rest of the female prisoners executed at once!”

“In here!” Anara pointed, indicating the entrance to the female cell block. Breaking down the door, Marcus entered first, smiling in relief as he beheld the faces of his wife and children.

“Camilla! Stand back! We’ll have you out in a moment.”

“Not so fast...” Shalev called back, “We’ve got company—looks like a platoon of soldiers...”

“Take cover, everyone!” Anara ordered as gunfire rang out, “We have to hold them off!”

PART 8

We hoped you would draw strength from each other...” the angelic figure declared sadly, “That through harmony and unity you would grow. But...while the first group did achieve a form of harmony, unity escaped it. And so we brought in the ones called ‘Romans’. We saw how they had achieved a form of unity and purpose on their homeworld and hoped that that would translate here, while at the same time contact with the first ones would ameliorate their more...atavistic...traits. We were wrong about that as well...”

Watching the broadcast on their small black and white television set, Rabbi Ashkel and his wife Deborah nodded their heads knowingly as little Margaret played on the floor in front of them.

“As we observed...occasionally intervening through our appearances as one of the many deities of the ‘Romans’, at first we were pleased. They had indeed achieved the unity and harmony we sought for you all. Yes, it was a unity built on conquest, but we were sure that, in time, we would be able to mold your unity into one more □suitable. We manipulated and oversaw from the shadows with the one you called the Emperor and his closest advisors the only one knowing the truth. Again...we were wrong. We thought ourselves so superior...so very smug...that we could alter the one truly immutable force in the universe—the free will of the individual. Strife arose. We could not...short of a more forceful direct intervention...change that fact. So...we tried another approach...”

Hearing the beating on the thick doors of the recording studio, Chris directed a group of idle technicians and the rebels guarding them to throw up additional barricades. “It’s in your own best interests to help us here...” the starship captain admonished the reluctant technicians, “...those soldiers probably have orders to kill everyone in the studio—including you.” Seeing that his warning had the desired result as the beating on the door increased in both volume and force, the captain tapped his comm badge, “Mr. Miller? Do you have the coordinates?”

“Yes, sir.” The second officer replied, “He apparently still has Commander Rysyl’s comm badge on him. We’ve locked in.”

“Good. Transport the proconsul to these coordinates now.”

On your birth world, we saw the growth of a new religion...one based on the worship of the son of the deity the first group worshipped and noted that it was gaining in popularity amongst many. We also discovered that a few of those that we brought to this world belonged to this new sect. We thought that this new faith would provide the perfect means for us to achieve the society we were trying to shape. Appearing to one of these ‘Son worshippers’, we attempted to guide the course of this religion here just as we manipulated the growth of the ‘Empire’—but again we failed. Once more, we refused to take into account the power of free will as this Son worship took on a form all its own in some ways similar—but in so many other ways completely different from— the faith that took shape on your home world. Like its early form on your home, it possessed the virtues of humility and purpose that we sought to inculcate within you, but unlike your birth world, here it failed to develop the structure that it needed in order to develop into a force that could alter the now static entity you call the Empire. Eventually...we gave up hope as we saw that your birth world and other worlds that we seeded were now bearing more prosperous fruit...

“Turn that Marsdamned radio off and get on your feet!” The decurion ordered as he slapped the back of the helmet of one of the legionnaires under his command. “We’ve got orders to decimate the population in our sector now. Every tenth person—man, woman, child, or infant—is to be executed. No pleas for mercy to be accepted.”

“They’ve got us pinned down!” Avram shouted as yet another fighter went down. “We’re also running low on ammo.”

“What are our options, Ma’am?” Shalev asked as he turned to the Deltan first officer crouched beside him.

“We’re boxed in here.” Anara replied grimly. “All we can do is hold out and hope whatever Chris’s plan works soon.”

Counting off every tenth person, the Decurion ordered those poor unfortunates to be stood up against the wall of what remained of an apartment building, its structure gutted by fire...its exterior riddled by bullets. Ripping a crying baby from its mother, the decurion thrust it into the hands of one of the women standing up against the wall.

“Stand ready!” The Roman officer ordered as his squad faced their intended victims; a second squad holding back the remainder of the population with raised rifles and bayonets.

“Take aim!” Several members of the firing squad, perspiration forming on their foreheads, visibly shook as their superior issued his commands.

“Fire!”

Nothing. No gunshots. Just sounds of whimpering and crying mixed with the odd angry shout.

“Fire!”

Again, no gunshots as the soldiers on the firing team lowered their weapons.

Drawing his sidearm, the decurion approached the first member of the firing squad. “Fire godsdamn you or I will shoot you!” Cocking his weapon he pointed it at the man’s head. “You have three seconds to comply. One...Two...”

A shot rang out as the decurion, a look of shock on his face, sank to the ground. The shaking soldier sighed in relief as he saw one of the guards who had been restraining the crowd lower his just fired weapon. At that moment, all of the soldiers lowered their weapons as the crowd rushed towards them, embracing them.

“How dare you order Operation *Carthago* to go into effect without my agreement?” Legate Pompey shouted in rage as he burst into the proconsul’s office. “You know a directive of this magnitude requires the consent of both civilian and military authorities.”

"I'm informing you now, Pompey." Elabrius replied as he stepped out from behind his desk, his dagger concealed in the loose sleeve of his shirt. "The rebellion has reached a crisis level and now that the barbarians are intervening..."

"We have no proof of that." Pompey retorted as he drew closer to the proconsul.

"I'd say the fact that we can't jam that broadcast's signal and that it is appearing on televisions and radios world-wide is proof enough." The proconsul bit back as he approached the legate. Pausing for a moment as the military officer moved to an on-guard stance, Elabrius's manner suddenly turned placating, "You're right, Pompey. I should have discussed it with you first. But...I didn't think there was time. The situation is growing direr by the hour. The revolt is spreading...you know that." Nodding his head as he saw that the legate was dropping his guard, Elabrius approached slowly, maintaining a non-threatening posture as he drew ever closer, "The soldiers are only now just receiving their orders..." the proconsul said as he closed the distance between the soldier and himself, "...there's still time to recall them if you think that is best."

Drawing next to his intended victim, Elabrius slipped the dagger from its hiding place only to feel the sharp bite of a blade in his own side. "You honestly didn't think I would be that stupid, did you?" Pompey whispered harshly as he clutched the proconsul in a death embrace. Just then, he heard a strange sound as he and the wounded proconsul were bathed in a blue light.

Reappearing in the broadcasting studio, a stunned Pompey, still clutching the bleeding Elabrius looked about in astonishment.

"T'Pren..." Captain Hobson ordered as he pointed his phaser at the bewildered Pompey while the Vulcan security officer removed the daggers from both men's hands. Taking the proconsul in her arms, the dark haired woman, laying him gently down on the floor took out a medkit and began her ministrations.

"He's lost a lot of blood sir." She reported, "...but his condition has stabilized. Provided he gets proper medical care soon, he should survive."

Nodding his head on receipt of his security officer's news, Chris turned his attention to the other man, "Who are you?"

"I am Legate Pompey—the military commander of this province." The Roman responded, only this time without much of the arrogance and swagger that he usually exhibited, "And who are you?"

"I am Captain Christopher Hobson..." the brown haired man holding the phaser replied in his usual patrician voice, "I take it you've heard this..."

"How could I not?" The legate responded as the image spoke its final words

"And so...my children...the decision was made to abandon you. However, not all of us agreed with it. We were ashamed of how we attempted to manipulate and use you and wanted to at least partly redress it. Besides leaving this confession, we also left behind some of our knowledge. Not enough to take you to the stars...the image shook its head somberly...at least not immediately. But enough to give you a start. What you choose to do with this knowledge...the angelic image declared...will be up to you. You can use it to propel yourself forward...or to destroy yourselves. Your fate rests upon your free will as it always has and always will."

The image disappeared to a hushed audience; the only sound a crash as the door as the door finally gave way to the incessant battering. As the Roman soldiers and the rebels leveled their weapons at each other, first Legate Pompey's voice, soon followed by Valeria Tiberia's rang out.

"Hold!"

"Wait!"

Both sides held their positions, one group warily eyeing the other as their leaders slowly approached each other. Coming to within a length of each other, they halted.

"You saw?" Valeria asked.

"Yes." The legate replied.

"So..." The lovely rebel inquired, "What do we do now? Do we fight or do we talk?"

"Disturbances have broken out not just throughout this province..." The general began, "...but all over the world."

"What else did you expect?" Valeria replied, "They've just been told that everything they've ever believed has been a lie; that the Empire that guided them all was nothing more than someone else's puppet."

"I've lost men..." Pompey began warily only to be cut off by Valeria.

"As have I. Also women and children have been killed by your soldiers."

"Not my men." The legate retorted shaking his head vigorously. "Those were Elabrius' lictors who committed those crimes."

"All of them?" Valeria asked disbelievingly. Pausing as the legate attempted in vain to mount a response, the chestnut haired woman continued, "Let us admit that wrongs were committed by both sides, shall we?" Taking Pompey's single nod of the head as assent, she suggested, "We'll have time to fix blame later. For now...if you will agree to the few demands we have...I am willing to propose an immediate ceasefire and resumption of talks."

"And what are your demands?" The legate asked suspiciously.

"They're quite simple and reasonable." Valeria replied. "First...the release of all political prisoners. We can discuss any reparations due to them or their families for their incarcerations or deaths later."

"Done."

"Second...the immediate cessation of all persecution against former slaves, Descendents, Son worshippers—whether Traditionalist or New Covenant, and all Children of Isaac.

"Agreed."

"Third...the arrest and eventual trial of Proconsul Elabrius for his murders of innocents."

"Gladly done." The legate quickly agreed, gesturing for two of his men to take the wounded official into custody. "Any other demands?" Pompey inquired with just the faintest of sarcastic tones.

Captain Hobson then spoke up. “The release of any of my people currently in custody.”

“Also agreed.” The general affirmed, adding, “Although I think they’ve been causing enough problems on their own.” Jerking his head towards the phone, he asked, “May I?”

Upon receiving both Valeria and Hobson’s nods of assent, the legate picked up the phone and spoke into it. “You heard me—an immediate ceasefire. I want a halt to all operations everywhere. Yes...Valeria Tiberia will issue the same orders to her people.” Holding out the phone to the young woman, the legate frowned, “Your turn.”

Taking the proffered phone, she dialed a number. “Yes Livia...what you saw was true. Pass the word—we have a ceasefire. Hold all operations. Fire only if fired upon.”

Nodding his head in satisfaction, the Roman general turned to Hobson, “Captain...I’ve sent runners to the cellblocks where your people probably are telling the soldiers on the spot to cease fire and to allow your people to join you.”

“That’s it.” Shalev sighed as his SMG clicked, indicating that there was no round in the chamber, “I’m out.”

“I am too.” Marcus declared as he drew a short sword. “Looks like this is it.”

As the prisoners prepared to face the oncoming rush of soldiers, they looked at each other in astonishment as the gunfire coming from the opposing side died down. Moments later, a voice rang out.

“You in the cell block! We’ve just received orders from Legate Pompey. You’re to be allowed to go free. You’re to be given safe conduct to the broadcasting studio where your leaders await you!”

“It’s a trick!” Marcus growled as he hefted his blade. “They seek to get us out into the open so that we’d make easier targets.”

“Maybe...” Anara replied sanguinely, “But unless one of us has a way of conjuring ammunition out of thin air I don’t see as we have any other choice.”

Making her decision, she stood up and walked towards the soldiers. Shrugging his shoulders, Yitzhak followed immediately behind her as, eventually did the others. Approaching the Roman officer, the Deltan woman declared, "Very well...take us to our people."

Picking up the ringing phone, Legate Pompey listened for a few moments, grunted an assent, and then, setting the phone back down, turned back to Captain Hobson. "Your people are all alive and will be here shortly. Now..." the Roman general inquired, "...what are your intentions? If you people are coming as invaders..."

"Nothing of the sort." Chris interjected quickly, shaking his head vigorously. "Once my people have been returned and I am assured as to the fair treatment of the Descendents, then I and my ship shall depart."

"You're abandoning us as well?" Valeria interrupted, a note of anger in her voice. "Just like the others—the ones who brought us here in the first place—and later like my grandfather did my grandmother."

"No." Chris replied with a shake of his head. "We will take with us any Descendents who wish to leave with us—but I would first strongly suggest to you—and to them..." he added as he noticed both Rysyla and Anara entering the room, accompanied by Yitzhak and Avram, "...that they remain here—to help in the building of your world. We will watch you from a distance—but we will not interfere with you. You have the right to determine your own destiny—that was what those who had first brought you here had failed to remember. You possess your own free will. I think it's about time that you had the opportunity to use it. When you are ready for us..." Hobson smiled as his original landing party gathered around him, "...you know where you can find us—we'll be waiting." Tapping his comm badge, Chris then spoke, "Hobson to *Perseus*. Beam us up. We've done enough here for now."

Epilogue

"The Captain's filed his report with Starfleet Command." Lieutenant Velen declared to the other officers gathered around the table with him as he sipped his beer, the sounds of soft jazz filling the recreational lounge dubbed *Andie's Place* by the crew of the *Perseus*. "So...how badly do you think they're going to ream him?" The Denobulan science officer inquired.

"Hope they're not too hard on him." Treasure opined as she drank her beer. "Him and the others got stuck tryin' to clean up a big mess that began when those poor people got brought over there—I know a little 'bout what that's like." The North Star native declared as she refilled her glass from the pitcher in the center of the table.

"Don't worry about it, Captain..." Rear Admiral Krystine Leone smiled as she regarded the poker-faced man appearing on her monitor, understanding now why he had earned his nickname, 'The Iceman'. "I know a thing or two about having to skirt around the bounds of the Prime Directive. It was a difficult situation and you resolved it about as well as anyone else could have and I've stated as such in my report to Command. Acting on your recommendations, we're setting up manned anthropological observational outposts within the system to monitor the Magna Romans. Now...as to your next mission..."

"Where's Anara?" Treasure asked as Dr. Helen Nor joined the group at the table. "I thought she was going to join us after you finished undoing her cosmetic surgery."

Sighing, the human-Kataran hybrid shook her head, "She said that she has to undergo a Deltan purification rite..."

"That's right." T'Pren observed, "To Deltans, one of the worst sins you can commit is to use sex to willfully harm someone else."

"Hell..." Treasure snorted as she gulped her beer, "She only did what she had to do to get loose. I'd 'a done the same thing if I were in her shoes and didn't see any other way out."

"I probably would have too." T'Pren agreed, "I wouldn't have liked it...but if I didn't have any other choice..."

"But neither one of you are Deltan." Dr. Nor interjected. Taking another deep breath, the doctor added, "Plus...there's the Captain..."

"Oh..." Treasure exclaimed as the little group fell silent for a moment, "I'll bet he's not happy about it..."

"That's not it..." Helen disagreed, shaking her head, "At least not completely..." she qualified, "There's something else...something I don't think is going to be so easy for them to fix..."

Waiting patiently at the threshold of his lover's quarters watching silently as she sat cross-legged and naked on the floor of her room; Captain Hobson listened quietly as she chanted her dirge like song. Pausing as she felt his presence, Anara, standing up, slipped on the robe lying across the back of her chair. "Chris. Now is not a good time..."

"I realize that." The captain replied with just the slightest crack in his normally stoic exterior. "I just wanted you to know that it was all my fault. I should never..."

"You should never have gone down on that landing party, Chris." Anara interrupted. "You didn't trust me..."

"Of course I trust you." Hobson objected as his icy exterior melted even more. "We had this conversation earlier—remember."

"Of course I do." The lovely Deltan replied, "And I know that you sincerely believe that the reasons you gave were the right reasons. But I know better, Chris. I'm an empath—remember? We're bonded. Deep down—so deep that you won't—that you can't—admit it to yourself—you were afraid to trust me alone down on the surface of that planet. And...maybe you were right not to trust me." The tormented first officer surprisingly admitted.

"What do you mean?" Chris exclaimed, disbelievingly. "I was right not to trust you? Of course I trust you—otherwise I would never have asked you to be my first officer—regardless of our relationship." He declared, his steel-gray eyes piercing into hers. "You should know by now that where the welfare of the

ship and its crew are concerned I never allow my personal feelings to intervene.”

“Not knowingly...” Anara replied, gently shaking her head, “Not on a conscious level. But subconsciously...” Taking a deep breath, the Deltan woman reluctantly declared, “Chris...I think we should...until we are able to assure ourselves that both consciously and subconsciously we can be both captain and first officer and also lovers that...for the near future at least...we keep our relationship as strictly professional as possible.”

“Are you sure about that?” Chris responded, his heart shattering as he struggled to retain his calm outer demeanor. “Are you sure that is the only way?” He pleaded, giving the woman standing before him one more chance to rethink her course.

“For now it is...” Anara affirmed, tears welling up in her eyes. “Unless...you’d rather I transferred off the ship?”

“No, Commander.” Chris replied in a patrician tone, shaking his head as the Iceman reasserted himself. “That will not be necessary. I’m sorry to have disturbed you. Good night.” With that, Captain Hobson turned and walked away as his ex-lover watched, her tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Chris...” she whispered in a soft voice as Hobson disappeared down the corridor, “I’m so sorry.” Walking back into her quarters, Anara waited as the door swished shut. Stripping off her robe, she sat back down on the floor. Crossing her legs, she once again began her lamentation, this time adding the name of Christopher Hobson to those she had sinned against.

Returning to his quarters, Captain Christopher Hobson picked out the leather volume from his bookcase inscribed, “Meditations” by Marcus Aurelius. Sitting down on his couch, he opened the book and ordered, “Computer...play Chopin Nocturne: Opus Number 9, all three movements and repeat until I command otherwise.” As the music filled his quarters, the lonely captain read quietly to himself...the dead emperor and the dead composer his only companions.

The End