

Previously...

Lieutenant Ricardo Hernandez, aka Aztec, joined Lieutenant Commanders Powers and Thomas in one of many officers' lounges on Starbase *Gateway Alpha*. He sat down across the table from the other two.

"The Malurian assassin gave us the name of her employer. Glinn Tanar, Powers said."

"I never heard of him," Hernandez replied.

"He's a military officer—currently the executive officer of a Galor-class warship assigned to the new Second Order," Powers said. "His ship was last reported patrolling the border near the Badlands. It turns out that his brother was Gul Renet who commanded the *Troynir*."

"That was the ship that you destroyed during the war." Thomas reached over and grabbed Aztec's arm. "He will probably try again when he finds out that his hired assassin failed."

"I've notified Starfleet Intelligence," Powers said. "I have a friend who specializes in covert surveillance, and he has promised to keep a close eye on Glinn Tanar and track his movements."

"Is that necessary, sir?"

"It's...prudent," the JAG officer said. "It never hurts to be cautious, Aztec."



A week later, Glinn Tanar received word that the Malurian had failed and was taken into custody. Tanar could only assume that his intended prey was aware of who had hired the assassin and would be on the alert for another attempt. As a Cardassian, Tanar could be patient and bide his time, but he determined that a day would come when he would avenge his brother.

In the meantime, Tanar assumed that Starfleet would inform his superiors of his actions, so he considered his next steps carefully. His revenge for his brother's *murder* would cost him a lot, and he would go as far as he had to. Even if that meant that he had to resign his post. *Better to leave by his own will than to be removed in disgrace*, he thought.



To Boldly Go: The Cardassian's Gambit

A Personal Story

By Cleve Johnson

STARDATE 58307.1

Lieutenant Hernandez walked through the corridor and stopped in front of his CO's quarters. He pressed the tab on the LCARS com panel next to the door to announce his presence.

"Who is it," Kimberly Thomas's voice replied.

"It's Ricardo, sir."

“Enter.”

The door slid aside allowing Hernandez to enter. He walked in and the door closed behind him.

Thomas stood up from behind her desk and smiled at her XO. “Aztec! What can I do for you?”

Hernandez returned the smile and said, “I wanted to congratulate you on your promotion to full commander.”

“Thank you, but you did that after the ceremony.”

“I know, but there were a lot of people wanting your attention last night.” Aztec crossed his hands in front of him. “I just want you to know that I think you deserve the promotion and that it is overdue.”

“Thanks for saying so, Ricardo.” Thomas saw Aztec’s face and knew that something else was on his mind. “You didn’t need to make a special trip to congratulate me. Spill the beans.”

“Sir?” Aztec lowered his eyes momentarily and looked up into the CAG’s face. “I don’t know how you do that.”

“Do what?” Thomas teased.

“Read me like a book,” Aztec said.

“We’ve known each other for a long time.”

“And been through a lot of tough times, too, as well as better times.” He uncrossed his hands. “I would like to request a leave of absence.”

“You have plenty of leave time built up, Ricardo. How much time do you need?”

“I don’t know, CAG. I have a personal matter I need to attend to.”

Thomas had recently heard a rumor, through Lieutenant Commander Powers, that Starfleet Intelligence might have a lead on Glinn Tanar’s whereabouts. He had been spotted heading to one of the Cardassian colony worlds near what was formally known as the DMZ. Thomas suspected that her XO’s personal matter involved going in search of Glinn Tanar. “Let SI handle the matter, Ricardo.”

“Commander...Kim...If you knew that someone was seeking your life, would you wait around for that person to try again or would you go after him?” Aztec looked intently at Thomas.

Kim nodded her head. “I...understand how you must feel. Permission granted. You are on leave for the next forty-five days.”

“Thank you, CAG.”

“Be careful, Aztec.”

“Si, I will.” Lieutenant Hernandez nodded and turned to leave, but he stopped and turned around when the CAG spoke again.

“Ricardo.” Thomas’s voice was gentle and soft.

“Si?”

“Forty-five days,” Thomas said more firmly. “Whether you find him or not, I want you back here on day forty-six.”

Hernandez lowered his eyes. “Si,” he said as he turned and exited the CAG’s quarters.



Hernandez had flown one of the Raptor Wing’s remaining *Peregrine* fighters to Pacifica where he rendezvoused with the U.S.S. *Venture*, which was headed for Starbase 47. Once the *Venture* arrived at the starbase, Hernandez thanked the captain and made his goodbyes, and then he flew his fighter toward the old DMZ and the Cardassian colony planet known as Kelrabi V where Starfleet Intelligence believed Glinn Tanar to be. He felt a little guilty about not telling CAG everything, but he would fill her in once he returned to Starbase *Gateway Alpha*.

Hernandez wanted to remain inconspicuous, but arriving in a Federation fighter was not the best way to do it. He decided to chance it since he didn’t even know if Tanar was on this world or not. He made an educated guess that if Tanar was on the planet, he would probably be found somewhere with few humans. Although Kelrabi V was a Cardassian planet, many of the outlying worlds included many humans and other Federation members—civilians from benevolent groups trying to help the Cardassians rebuild after the war as well as Starfleet personnel assigned to keep the peace and administrate until the Federation was satisfied that the Cardassian Union had a stable civilian government capable of holding everything together as well as keeping the peace with Cardassia’s interstellar neighbors. The war had been over for almost six years, but politicians and special interest groups butting in tended to slow down true progress.

Hernandez contacted the Starfleet-run flight control center for the planet and requested to land at the capital’s spaceport. After receiving permission and coordinates, he set his fighter down and made his way to the information center where he inquired about how to find out about recent arrivals. He did not expect Tanar to use his real name, but it was worth a shot.

Surprisingly, there was a Cardassian named Tanar that arrived less than three weeks prior and had been reported as staying in rented quarters on the outskirts of the capital. “This gringo is not covering his tracks very well,” Hernandez whispered to himself. “He wants to be found. These Cardassians have a reputation for their mind games and manipulation to trap their enemies.” Hernandez knew that he would need to be cautious.

He decided that after a long trip, he would be wise to find someplace to stay and get some rest before searching for Tanar. Hernandez figured it would be best to remain close to the spaceport where a larger contingent of Starfleet personnel was present, so he inquired where the spaceport guest quarters office was located and went there.



Tanar, a former glinn of the new Second Order, watched his brother's killer, from a distance, enter the building where Starfleet housed visiting officers. Every day for a week, he watched Hernandez come back from his daily searching at about the same time. He observed Hernandez's routine of coming and going and knew that the time to exact his revenge was near.

Tanar was aware that Starfleet Intelligence had started tracking him months ago, and he used the organization to his advantage by allowing himself to be followed to draw Hernandez to this planet. Since arriving, Tanar had dropped out of sight and made sure that Starfleet Intelligence had lost his trail. His plan had worked perfectly to set the trap. One more day until his prey would be caught...and disposed of.



Hernandez entered his quarters as he had done every day during the past week. Looking around the main room, he noticed something different—a small device on the end table in the corner of the room between the couch and a chair. He had been expecting a trap, and now he was apparently caught in it. What was the object on the table? A bomb? A sensing device? Why wasn't it hidden?

He wore civilian clothes reminiscent of his Mexican ancestors, but he made sure that he had his communicator. It was in the right pocket of his trousers. He pulled it out and tapped it. "Hernandez Alpha Two Omega." He tapped the communicator again and slowly approached the device. When he came within four meters of the device, a red light started blinking. Hernandez immediately stopped and thought that this might be his intended end, but fortunately, he was mistaken.

A beam of light shot out of the device and a holographic image of a Cardassian appeared in front of Hernandez. The translucent image, not solid like characters on a holodeck, glared at the Starfleet pilot. *"We have never met, Lieutenant Hernandez, but I know who you are. You killed my brother, Gul Renet, and his crew. Some say that it was an act of war and revenge should not be sought. I do not care what some say, Lieutenant. I have thought of nothing but avenging my brother since you destroyed his ship and took his life."*

"If your people had not allied with the Dominion, your brother might still be alive, amigo."

"You are probably thinking that my brother would be alive if we had not joined the Dominion..."

"Si, amigo."

"...but that is irrelevant since we did join it. Gul Dukat was a fool to do so, but that does not matter now. The only thing that matters is that you killed my brother, and I am going to kill you. I wanted you to see the face of your executioner before your death."

Hernandez hoped that the Cardassian's plan would fail, but he crossed himself just in case he was about to meet his maker.

The image of Tanar held up a remote control and placed his thumb on a button. “*Goodbye, Lieutenant Hernandez.*” He pressed the button, but nothing happened. Tanar’s expression revealed his surprise and anger.

Hernandez heard phaser fire outside in the distance as Tanar’s image disappeared. “*Vaya con Dios, amigo.*”



Ricardo entered the building where Starfleet Security and Starfleet Intelligence maintained offices. He walked to the receptionist’s desk and announced himself and his reason for being there.

“Lieutenant Commander Lin is expecting you, sir. Her office is down the corridor, third door on the right,” the receptionist said.

“*Gracias... Thank you.*” Ricardo walked past the desk and down the corridor. He stopped in front of the old-style wooden door with an old-fashioned spherical doorknob. *At least there is a com panel,* he thought as he pressed one of the pads to announce his arrival.

“Enter.”

Ricardo turned the knob and opened the door, walked in, and closed the door behind him. It almost seemed refreshing to use his own power to open a door rather than have it open form him.

“Good morning, Lieutenant,” Lieutenant Commander Rachel Lin said. “Please have a seat.”

Ricardo walked up to the SI officer’s desk and sat in one of the chairs opposite her on the other side of the desk. “I want to thank you for capturing Tanar, Commander.”

“No thanks are necessary, Lieutenant. It is all part of the job. Our civilian agents and the strike team did all the work.”

“Please pass on my gratitude,” Ricardo said. “I was wondering if it is possible to see Tanar and talk with him.”

“I thought you might want to do that,” Lin replied. “Promise me that you will not try to kill him?”

“That is not my intention but forgive me for wanting to rub salt into his wounds.”

Lin smiled. “I don’t blame you. I’d probably do the same in a similar situation.” She rose from her chair and walked around the desk. “Please come with me.”

Ricardo stood and followed the SI officer out the door and up the corridor to the reception area. Ricardo followed Lin into one of the four turbolifts.

Lin placed her hand on a sensor pad. “Brig, Level Nine.”

When the doors parted, Lin exited, followed by Ricardo. Lin stopped and turned to face the pilot. “Level Nine is the most secure internment level and has the tightest security on the

planet,” she said. “Transporter beams are blocked, and each cell is under constant surveillance from the security control rooms. Force field generators have quadruple redundancy power sources.”

“No guards?”

“There are guards monitoring from three different locations and can be here within thirty seconds when necessary. Also...” Lin moved closer to Ricardo to whisper in his ear. “...there are at least three guards in here at all times wearing stealth suits.”

Ricardo nodded his head. “I guess that prevents people like me from wanting to take part to punish the perpetrator.”

“Well, that is not the intent, but...”

Ricardo’s eyes seem to twinkle. “No worries of that happening by me, Commander. May I approach his cell and talk to him?”

“Of course. I’ll wait here.”

Ricardo walked to Tanar’s cell and stopped about a meter in front of the force field. He watched the Cardassian sitting on a bunk and staring at the floor. He wondered how long he would need to wait before Tanar decided to acknowledge his presence. He did not need to wait long.

Tanar started speaking, not averting his eyes from the floor. “You should be dead, Lieutenant. Why did my bomb not detonate?”

“Your bomb was found and deactivated shortly after you planted it,” Ricardo said. “You should not have underestimated the resources and abilities of Starfleet Intelligence, mi amigo. You thought that you were using them to draw me into your trap when in fact, they were setting a trap for you, and I was the bait.”

Tanar looked up. “What does this term ‘amigo’ mean? I am unfamiliar with it.?”

“It means ‘friend.’”

Tanar glared at Ricardo, his eyes like fire. “You killed my brother. I tried to kill you...twice. Why would you call me a friend?”

Ricardo kept his face neutral, but he was elated with how the conversation was going. “Do you know what sarcasm is?”

Tanar continued to glare but did not speak for several moments. When he finally opened his mouth, he did not know what to say except to ask one last question. “Do you rejoice in seeing me locked in here? Does it satisfy you that you have defeated me?”

Ricardo considered the questions and wrestled with his conflicted emotions. Normally, he was not someone who relished being vindictive toward anyone, but Tanar had tried to kill him because he had sought vengeance for something that happened as an act of war. Ricardo never wanted to kill anyone, but as a Starfleet officer and fighter pilot, he knew that part of his job, in

defense of the Federation, might involve killing an enemy during military operations...especially when at war. However, what Tanar had done in response was not a part of the ugliness of war. The war had been over for years. Tanar's actions were personal, and Ricardo felt justified in his next words. "Si, amigo. I am glad that you are locked up and hope that you will never get out of prison. I hope that you always remember your defeat. I hope that it keeps you awake at night for the rest of your miserable life."

Tanar lowered his head and closed his eyes, not saying another word.

Ricardo turned and walked away to rejoin Lieutenant Commander Lin.



Ricardo had returned to Starbase *Gateway Alpha*. He went to the 63rd Fighter Wing's officer's barracks and made his way to his destination. He took a breath and pressed the intercom button on the com panel next to his CO's quarters' door.

"Who is it?"

"Aztec. May I enter?"

The door slid open, and Commander Thomas stood less than a meter from the door, facing Ricardo Hernandez. "Back with two days to spare. Any problems? Did you take care of that personal matter?"

Ricardo smiled. "No problems and Si, the Cardassian has been captured. I am ready to return to duty, CAG."

"You're still on leave for the next two days, Aztec."

"But I am ready to go back on duty today." Ricardo had his adventure and felt relieved and relaxed. He did not want to use any more leave time than necessary. He wondered why the CAG would not allow him to get back to work. And on cue, she told him.

"I've already processed the paperwork for you to report back on day forty-six," Thomas said. "I don't have time to process it again, so don't add more work to my schedule." Thomas smiled. "I'm on my way to fly a patrol, but I want to hear about your trip. Dinner at the La Mesa Cantina?"

Ricardo had not had his native foods for weeks, and he had missed the spicy flavors that he had grown up with. "Si. What time?"

"How does 1730 sound?"

"Perfect," Ricardo replied. "I will meet you then." He stepped away from the door, allowing his CO to exit her quarters. He watched as she walked away, grateful that the CAG was not only his commanding officer but also his friend. If she had not granted his request for leave, his enemy would still be at large.

He recognized that the real reason Kimberly Thomas had not returned him to duty right away was to give him time. Even if he did not want it, he needed a couple of days to rest from



his trip to reacclimate to the starbase and to his friends as well as to process what had happened. CAG did not need to order him to see a counselor. He knew that it was expected of him and that CAG could count on him to do what was expected.

The End