

## A Name Well Earned

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### Summary

Jal Karden, the young Kazon formerly known as Kar, has long sought to prove his worth in battle. His fateful encounter with Chakotay in 2372 prompted him to make the decision of a lifetime. At the lowest point of his life, he chose to follow Chakotay and join the Voyager crew's journey. In this story, Karden must prove his worth in the least likely of places: the holodeck.

Inspired by the Voyager episodes "Initiations" and "Heroes and Demons".

### Notes

My entry for Ad Astra's Weekly Challenge #11 - "One Reality Over".

"Hail, Lord Hrothgar! I bring friends! Beowulf and his companions, Leofstan, Wulfric, and Askill. They have come to destroy the beast Grendel's mother. Greet them well."

Jal Karden of the Kazon-Ogla stepped into the Hall of Heorot behind Harry Kim, Tom Paris, and Chakotay. The four of them were dressed in chainmail, with swords strapped to their belts. He skirted a long table, where many similarly garbed men were seated, eating, drinking, or in the middle of boisterous conversation. Harry led them all to the far end of the hall, where a large, older man was seated upon an ornately carved throne.

Chakotay had noticed the boy's incredulous expression as he took in the wrinkled old man seated before them. "Never underestimate an old man in a profession where men are expected to die young," he whispered to Karden.

Harry introduced each of his companions to the king: Tom as Leofstan, Chakotay as Askill, and finally Karden as Wulfric. *Such a strange name*, Karden thought as he bowed his head in deference. *"It suits you," he had said. "Especially since the wolf is the Ogla's sigil."* It was not a name he had earned in battle, though. But for Chakotay's sake, Karden agreed to play along.

"I bid you welcome to my hall once again, Beowulf," Hrothgar said. "And it is fortunate you brought friends with you, for ill tidings have befallen Heorot once again. It appears that slaying Grendel has brought the wrath of his mother upon us. I must ask you...will you aid us once again?"

"I would be honored, Your Highness," Harry said. "Perhaps my companions and I will bring home the monster's entire corpse as a trophy this time!"

Everyone laughed. Tom nudged Karden's shoulder and motioned for him to look up. Hanging like a grisly chandelier above the feasting table was a gigantic, severed arm; cruel black talons curled from its fingertips, and spines sprouted from its flesh from wrist to elbow.

"Shouldn't be too hard," Karden said. "I've handled worse than that."

"Ha! You think you can best the mother of the dreaded beast Grendel?" An equally old man with an even bushier beard than Hrothgar stepped toward Karden. "Bold words from such a young lad. Wulfric, was it? Your name means nothing to me, boy. I have heard no songs or tales of your deeds. Who are you to believe you can slay Grendel's mother?"

Karden bristled at the man's words. Sure, this was only a hologram, but he had heard such a challenge before...from his former leader Jal Razik.

"I can handle it," Karden snapped. "If you want proof, you can come with us when we seek the creature out. I'll slay it myself!"

"Wulfric..." Chakotay warned.

"So be it," the man said. "Let it be known that Unferth, son of Ecglaf, backs down from no challenge. Especially one given by a child!"

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"You just had to run your mouth, didn't you?"

Karden stepped carefully around an exposed tree root. "I am a warrior of the Kazon-Ogla," he grumbled. "If we were on a Kazon ship, this Unferth would be dead for insulting my honor!"

"We're not on a Kazon ship," Tom Paris said. "If this weren't a holodeck program, you'd likely have been slashed in half for being rude in the king's presence."

"Behold," Unferth announced as the party reached the edge of a massive black lake. "The lair of Grendel's mother!"

Karden drew his sword. It felt heavy and awkward in his hand, but he would have to ignore that for now. He brandished it towards the lake.

"You! Creature! Come forth! I am Wulfric, known to many more as Jal Karden, Kazon-Ogla! I earned my name when I slew Razik, the tyrannical king of my people in battle! I stand here before you, in exile! Your death will be my atonement! I fear no one!"

The surface of the lake rippled, and a dark, spiky shape broke the surface. Grendel's mother swung around to face them. She roared, baring needle-sharp teeth, eyes glowing with hatred. Karden shifted to a two-handed grip and roared back in defiance. He leaped toward the creature and swung for its throat.

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