

TZEN & THE ART OF SALAD DRESSING

By Steve "rRham" Dickinson

Charles Donovan stepped onto the Avenger Rec Deck, and was promptly greeted by a scream of agony.

"If you wave that big stick of yours in face one more time, I'll sever your head."

A dozen crewmen were gathering around a large plastic mat near the starboard side of the rec deck. On this mat were Commander Re'ming'ton, wielding a 1¹/₂ meter pole like a sword, growl-ing loudly at her opponent.

"And if you pull my tail again, I'll cut yours off and strangle you with it!"

Her opponent merely lowered it's head and grunted. It was over two meters tall, green, scaly, and had LOTS of teeth. It vaguely resembled a large alligator standing upright and the thought ran through Donovan's head that this was what mankind would have looked like had the dinosaurs not become extinct. It wore a Security uniform and wielded an identical stick made from wood instead of metal.

"Begin." came a voice.

Immediately, the two beings began circling each other, like two boxers looking for an opening. Charles moved closer and turned to a crewman. "What's going on?" he whispered.

"Howobay Ecelebraswn." the tall, dark-haired man chewed for several more seconds before swallowing.

"I beg your pardon?" Charles asked.

"You shouldn't, we've only just met." the man took a swig of a fizzing green liquid before continuing. "I said this is a holiday celebration."

"Ahh... a celebration of what?"

The crewman, whose engineering uniform identified him as a Lt. J.G., shrugged his shoulders. "Commander Re'ming'ton wanted displays of each culture's year-end holiday. So rRham decided to put on this demonstration."

"Oh," said Charles. "And rRham is..."

"Me," came a deep voice. The combatants' posturing had brought the green alien within earshot. "Also, this is not a year-end-holiday, but a rite of promotion. Yeargh..." The last came as he lunged at Chaym, who dodged nimbly aside before whacking rRham in the back of the head, only to be knocked off her feet by his back-lashing tail.

"Rite of promotion? Looks painful" mumbled Donovan.

"Hey!" cried Chaym. "I don't want to hear that from anybody who hasn't been up here, especially from **you**, Ensign." This came while ducking one swing and vaulting over another.

"She doesn't like you much, does she?" asked the engineer.

"No, I guess not," replied Donovan.

"Excellent." The tall man extended his hand. "Christopher Underwood, Engineering."

"Charles Donovan, Sciences." The Ensign wondered how being one crewman's enemy made you another crewman's friend.

"You're that guy Maria's been talking about, the one who figured out the whole plot involving the Romul..utk."

Chris was cut off by a swift elbow to the gut from a small woman with long brown hair. She and the fire lizard on her shoulder both cast him a dirty look.

"No loose lips, Underwood." She leaned around and shook hands with Ensign Donovan. "Amy Wilson, Chief of Operations." She smiled cutely. "Don't let Chris fool you. Chaym's actually very nice. She's just a little...extreme."

Underwood made a coughing noise, then started studying the ceiling intently.

Amy turned back to Donovan. "You should be proud. Not everybody foils an interstellar plot within their first week on a starship."

"I wouldn't quite put it that way..." Charles stammered.

"I would," grunted rRham, circling closer to the trio. "You would too if you had any idea of the amount of deskwork I've been forced to endure since the suspect was apprehended. I'm certain half the admirals in Starfleet want Chief Csuti's..." the alien paused for a series of feints and blows before continuing. "personal opinion on the situation at hand. HEEYA!" rRham cracked Chaym across the elbow loudly. "...in case there are any other related agents within the fleurgh..."

Chaym, having gotten sick and tired of playing cat and mouse with rRham, vaulted up, over, and onto the Tzen's back. Wrapping her tail and legs around the reptiloid's torso, the Mohnan covered his eyes with one hand and started rapping his skull violently with the metal rod.

"This is for tossing up my hamper puffs at the 7th Fleet banquet. <<CRACK>> I don't care if you were ill.

<<THUD>> I worked on them for hours!! <<WHACK>>. I'll never forgive you! << WHRACK, WHRACK, WHRACK. >>

Wilson, Underwood, and Donovan all watched, bewildered, as rRham stretched to his full height, placed his hands on his hips, and waited patiently for Chaym to calm down. He seemed totally obliv-ious to the fact that she was bludgeoning him, and complained quiet-ly under his breath about how Starfleet regulations forbade him from eating sentient creatures...even the really annoying ones. Chaym, on the other hand, was taking vengeance for all the injus-tices (real or imagined) which rRham had committed against the en-tire race of Galeve' Mohnans.

"A little extreme?" asked Donovan. "I'd hate to see her when she's out of control."

"You think this is bad?" said Chris. "Wait till the first week of the month. That when she gets her..."

A swiftly traveling elbow insured that the rest of Chris's sentence would forever remain unspoken.

"You must understand Ensign," chirped a satisfied looking Amy. "Sometimes you tell them not to go there and they go there anyway. When they do, it's my job to make certain that they never go there again." she smiled at Charles and looked, for a moment at least, to be very sweet and innocent.

"I hate you," said Chris, who had suddenly decided to sit upon the deck. "I really, really do. I spend long hours late at night plan-ning what I'm going to do to you. You can't possibly understand ex-actly how much I have in store for you. I can see you now: trapped in a cage, slowly being devoured by the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal, screaming in pain, calling out for

forgiveness, begging for my help, until finally, at the end, when it's almost over, I turn to you and say:

"WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUIET!!"

rRham, having gotten rather upset about Chaym's saying his mother had a special relationship with a Klingon targ, grabbed the lupine by the back of the neck, pulled her off his back and held her out at arm's length in front of him.

"This is not part of the ceremony." growled rRham as he ripped the metal staff from her hand.

Undaunted by her lack of weaponry, Chaym attempted to claw at the reptile's face, which was well beyond reach.

"...and then there was toyday! I planned for MONTHS! Everybody I've ever known was there! But YOU RUINED IT! I know it was YOU who threw gobstoppers and honey into my mane! Do you have any concept of how painful they were to get out???. And then you and Boldstar stormed in with those shock-guns! My hair was giving Carlos shocks ALL NIGHT!!! Then the Thagard showed up and you tried to throw them all in the brig! And what about SHORE LEAVE!!!"

"Wow," whistled Donovan. "Are ALL the ladies on this ship so..." Ensign Donovan looked from Amy to Chaym and back again "...extreme?"

"No," said Chris as he stood up and looked at his empty glass. "Only the members of the G.S.G."

"What's the G.S.G.?"

"I HEARD THAT!" Chaym yelled. She flailed within rRham's grasp, attempting unsuccessfully to face the two junior officers. "Underwood! I know you're up to something! I don't know what it is yet, but when I find out there'll be hell to pay!"

"Come on, guys, let's get something to drink before she rips your throats out." Amy gently pushed the two men toward a replicator that was well out of earshot.

"Honestly, Amy," said Chris, "I don't understand how Carlos puts up with her."

"Carlos," queried Charles. "Not Commander Maldonado?"

"Yup," piped Amy before she spoke her order to the replicator.

"But they're so different. Commander Maldonado is so..."

Chris cut him off. "Honest, trustworthy, thrifty, prudent, loy-al..." He seemed to be reciting some pre-memorized list.

"Well..no..it's just that he's so...normal, whereas Commander Re'ming'ton is so..."

"Extreme," came both Chris and Amy's voices. They cast each other dirty looks before Amy took her drink and moved aside for Chris to face the replicator.

"You just have to understand that Chaym isn't always this bad," said Amy.

"Yeah," interrupted Chris. "She's usually much worse."

Amy raised her elbow and Chris immediately started pressing buttons on the replicator's controls.

"You're not giving Chaym a chance to defend herself, Chris. Just because you hate her doesn't mean everybody else has to."

"Hey, I've got LOTS of good reasons to be annoyed at Chaym." Chris pressed another sequence of keys, then looked confused when the display flashed ACCESS DENIED at him. "Chaym thinks that it's funny to reprogram the sonic shower so that whenever you put your underwear on there's this chemical reaction that

makes your skin.... What the Hell is THIS?!"

"What's wrong?" asked Amy. She and Ensign Donovan leaned closer to observe the replicator panel.

"rRham must've changed the codes. I can't disengage the safety protocols on the food replicator."

Donovan's eyes grew to two huge circles. "Why on earth would you want to do that?"

"Because..." Chris popped off a panel and started rearranging optical chips. "Dew requires two hundred and thirteen percent more caffeine than Star Fleet protocols will allow...and since I can't get a wink of sleep without it..." Chris replaced the panel and pressed a button. Again the ACCESS DENIED message appeared. Chris paused, scratched his chin, then slammed his fist against the panel. The replicator beeped weakly and another glass of sparkling green liquid appeared.

"Ahhhh...." moaned Underwood as he swallowed. He then made a gracious bow and allowed Donovan to place his order. Charles approached and was about to order a meal when he paused and looked over at Underwood.

"Are the safeties still on?" Charles asked with a devilish look in his eyes.

"Yes.Why..?"

"Let me show you something I learned at the Academy." Don-ovan pulled up the voice recognition menu.

"Wait a minute! What are you doing, Ensign?" Amy peeked at the newly altered instructions. The lines of code were subtle, and the Chief of Operations knew that the mischief they would cause would last for months.

"No, NO, NO,NO,NO! There's no way I can let you get away with that." Amy pushed the Ensign aside and changed the lines of code. "However, this...."

Amy stepped back and allowed the men to see the final changes. Chris and Charles looked at the screen, then each other, then Amy.

"You're Evil." Charles said. "Incarnated."

"I have seriously underestimated you," added Chris.

Amy smiled cutely under the praise. The trio suddenly became serious as Cmdr. Re'ming'ton and Lt. rRham approached. "...not to mention the way you turned up your snout at my travel pies! That was an ancient Galeve' recipe dating back to the beginning of our culture."

rRham gave a guttural hiss. "The pies may have been baked at the dawn of your culture; they seemed far too stale to have been forged within this century."

"Forged!" Chaym stopped in the front of the replicator, oblivious to the three officers nearby. "You bake pies! You forge **metal**."

"There's a difference?!"

Chaym's hair stood on end and her claws extended. "You had better know the difference between my pies and a lump of metal!"

rRham blinked several times. "Metal digests easier?"

Chaym punched rRham violently in the stomach. When she saw that it had entirely no effect, she turned toward the replicator,

"Replicator: give me a big bowl of ice water." A salad appeared with a side order of Thousand Island dressing.

Chaym stared at the offending food, then rubbed her eyes as though she had been dreaming. Looking again and seeing that the dish had not disappeared, she turned to the three officers.

"Did you have any problems when you tried to use the replicator?"

The three looked back and forth at each other, then replied simultaneously, "No."

Chaym threw the food in the waste bin and turned back to the replicator. "Replicator: give me a big bowl of ice water...please."

Another salad and dressing appeared. The sound Chaym made vibrated glass on the other side of the Rec Deck.

"Let me try." rRham stepped around the Mohnan.

"Replicator: give me a swamp water, tepid, low methane content."

A bowl of disgusting-looking water appeared. rRham picked it up, swallowed the contents in a single gulp, and began picking algae from between his teeth. "The replicator is functioning perfectly, Commander."

Chaym shoved her way past the security officer.

"Give me some coffee!"

A salad appeared, with a side of dressing.

"Give me a soda!"

Another salad appeared.

"Pasta!"

A salad.

"Hamster puffs!"

Salad.

"CHOCOLATE!!!"

Salad.

"Fine! Salad, then!"

A salad appeared without any dressing.

"NNNNNOOOOOoooooo....."

More salad.

Chaym dropped to all fours and raced out the nearest exit. A couple of seconds later, VAdm. Rosenzweig and a confused Cmdr. Maldonado stepped onto the Rec Deck.

"Something wrong, Commander?" asked rRham.

"I'm not sure," said Carlos. "We just got buzzed by a Mohnan calling Mitzi's name and screaming about a lack of chocolate."

"Nothing unusual there," said rRham.

Alex looked at the three officers, each shoulder to shoulder and standing at full attention, with deadpan seriousness on their faces. The Admiral smirked. "You three wouldn't know anything about this, would you?"

"No, sir," the three replied with a little too much emphasis.

Then, with perhaps the greatest display of self control in Avenger history, they slowly turned and headed out the nearest exit, without so much as cracking a smile.

rRham turned a confused glance from the door, to his two superiors, to the four foot tall pile of salad next to the replicator. "Did I miss something, sirs?"

Alex and Carlos shot glances at each other.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

The End. (Of Donovan if Chaym ever finds out.....)