

Starship: Excelsior
"At Death's Door"
(Season 4, Episode 3)
by Martin Fisher

Transcribed by Peter Stine

Note: Lines in brackets were recorded but interrupted. The complete line is left here for fuller context:

SCENE 403-01**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* passes by at warp speed. Fast!)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

(Red alert is sounding.)

ROL: That's it! That's as fast as she'll go!

DOVAN: Distance of the wave?

NEEVA: Ten thousand kilometres. And closing.

(Dovan activates the intercom.)

DOVAN: Bridge to Engineering. We need more speed! (pause) Dovan to J'naya! Can you hear me?

LORHROK: Intercom's out. The wave's disrupting all systems.

(Sensors beep.)

NEEVA: Wave closing to nine thousand kilometers!

DOVAN: Do what you can, Bev.

ROL: Aye, sir.

LORHROK: Sir, if that wave hits us...

DOVAN: It'll tear this ship apart like a piece of paper in a rainstorm made of knives. I know what a null particle is, Number One.

NEEVA: Eight thousand kilometers!

(There is a slowly increasing low rumble. There's an explosion way below decks and some bridge alarms.)

YUBARI: Casualties, Deck Seventeen!

ROL: I've lost impulse and helm control!

(The rumbling is still getting louder. Systems start to fluctuate and fail.)

DOVAN: We don't need them! Just give us more speed!

(Lorhrok checking readouts at his bridge console.)

LORHROK

We'll be lucky to maintain this speed. Warp field geometry is degrading!

NEEVA: Four thousand kilometers!

YUBARI: Sir, recommend we raise shields.

DOVAN: Against a null shockwave? Shields'd be nothing but a power drain.

NEEVA: Two thousand kilometers! Impact in six seconds!

(The rumbling is now at its highest. The sensors are doing a countdown from six seconds.)

Bleep.

Bleep.

Bleep.

Bleep.

Bleep.

(The rumbling stops, almost abruptly. Systems come back online.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Report?

NEEVA: The wave's dissipated, Captain. All systems coming back online. Full control restored.

DOVAN: Stand down red alert. Good work, Bev.

(The red alert is cancelled as the ship drops to yellow alert.)

ROL: Thank you, sir.

J'NAYA: *Engineering to Bridge. Is everyone alright?*

DOVAN: We are. How's my ship?

J'NAYA: *Winded, sir. But safe. Recommend we drop a warning buoy and stay as far away from this sector as possible.*

DOVAN: Negative, Miss J'naya. We're going back in there. Be ready to jump to maximum warp instantly, in case we run into another of these shockwaves.

J'NAYA: *Yes, sir. Can we have a minute to, ehm... clean up?*

DOVAN: Permission granted. Bridge out.

LORHROK: Back in there, sir? Are you sure that's a good idea? We were just passing through, minding our business, when a null particle shockwave suddenly popped up on long-range and tried to murder us. Maybe we should stay out of the neighborhood?

DOVAN: Tell me about null particles, Lorhrok.

LORHROK: Supposedly... they are perfect annihilators. They touch a particle of matter, and that matter is gone – no conservation of mass or energy.

DOVAN: Isn't that a bit far-fetched, Lieutenant?

LORHROK: It should be completely impossible, according to everything we've learned about physics in the past six thousand years. In fact, my homeworld's science agency – the Trill Academy – just put out a paper last year that proved null particles can't physically exist.

DOVAN: But they almost just destroyed the *Excelsior*. (Pause) Exploration is the whole reason we're out here. Would you ever forgive me if we ran away?

LORHROK: No, captain, I would not. Just playing the devil's advocate. (he stands) I'll get down to Engineering and see if they need an extra pair of hands.

Lorhrok exits to the turbolift.

DOVAN: Helm, find out where that shockwave came from and go there. Warp Eight.

ROL: Aye, sir.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The *Excelsior* goes to warp.)

THEME SONG!

NARRATOR: *Tonight's episode: "At Death's Door," by Martin Fisher.*

SCENE 403-02**LOCATION: SPACE**

(Excelsior flies by at a good warp clip.)

LOCATION: SICKBAY

NURSE HENNESSY: Melissa?

SHARP: Mike. How are the new Trill patients?

NURSE HENNESSY: Not good, doctor. The burns are much worse than we thought. Their bed was right against the bulkhead when that coolant tank exploded. (pause) We're not sure either of them will survive.

SHARP: What about Teela's symbiont?

NURSE HENNESSY: Hard to say. (Pause) We're contacting the top names on the ship's Trill Emergency Transplant list – First Officer Alec Lohrok and Transporter Chief Marel Lorth are on standby. (Pause) Just a precaution, of course.

(Sharp stands.)

SHARP: Don't worry, Mike. Jalin Tigan loves his wife too much to die without her... and Teela Ob has enough will-to-live for both of them.

NURSE HENNESSY: She has lived four lifetimes.

(Sharp starts walking.)

SHARP: All the more reason to want to keep living. Let's take a look.

SCENE 403-03**LOCATION: SPACE**

(Excelsior decelerates to normal space.)

LOCATION: BRIDGE

ROL: Approaching origin coordinates. No sign of null particles in the vicinity.

LORHROK: Standard orbit. Neeva, what are we looking at?

NEEVA: Class-M planet, sir.

LORHROK: Class-M. This far out from the sun?

NEEVA: There's an energy field around the planet; like a Shroud. It's letting most signals through, but not letting very much out again.

ROL: A greenhouse effect.

DOVAN: Artificial?

NEEVA: Scanners are having a hard time with it. The Shroud is made of null particles, sir.

DOVAN: Interesting. What else can you tell us?

NEEVA: The planet was definitely inhabited at some point, but I'm not reading anything but ghosts now. Signs of orbital bombardment.

DOVAN: That explains why nobody's home. Was this recent?

NEEVA: No, sir. The ruins are at least a quarter-million years old. (sensor alert) Captain, they're Iconian!

DOVAN: Ah, the legendary demons of air and darkness. Pull back on scanners. We don't want to trigger [any sort of automated welcome.]

(Sensors and proximity alarms beep frantically. Yellow alert sounds.)

NEEVA: Sir, we're being scanned! It's a deep alpha beam! Accessing our computer database!

(We hear the computers being rapidly shuffled through.)

DOVAN: Shields up!

(A scanner beam rises in sound, passes back and forth over the bridge several times.)

YUBARI: Do you want me to target the source with torpedoes, sir?

DOVAN: Negative. It's just a suspicious old computer snooping through our luggage. Bit like my gramps. Don't do anything to scare it.

(The scanner beam fades.)

ROL: Looks like they're finished.

NEEVA: They took a lot of classified data from our computers, but no damage.

DOVAN: Good. There's no one left in the galaxy who can read Iconian databanks, so let's just hope this planet doesn't have any more surprises.

(A new sensor alert at Rol's console.)

ROL: Sir?

DOVAN: Yes, Mister Rol.

ROL: Another surprise for you, captain. The scan lit up another vessel, thirty thousand kilometers to stern. It's in a decaying orbit, sir.

YUBARI: That's not all. I'm getting multiple hull breaches.

DOVAN: Why didn't we see this ship immediately?

YUBARI: I'm not sure.

ROL: I am.

DOVAN: What do you mean, Bev?

ROL: See for yourself. I'm putting her on screen.

(The viewscreen activates.)

(Pause.)

LORHROK: How... is that starship even possible?

ROL: It never occurred to our computers that that thing could be a spaceship.

DOVAN: Assemble an away team. Now.

SCENE 403-04**LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP – ENGINE SECTION**

(We hear some conveyors, gears, flame, and... steam.)

(Transporters beam in an away team.)

LORHROK: Would you look at that?

THE MAJOR: Sir, is this the engineering section?

SHARP: It sure is hot enough.

YUBARI: Not to mention filthy.

LORHROK: Ladies and gentlemen? That's a furnace. Those are conveyer belts, carrying something that looks suspiciously like coal to be dumped into that fire. And that fire... is apparently powering this entire spaceship. (Sharp pulls out her tricorder) Of course it's warm and a little dirty. It's also something I never even imagined. Someone, out there, somewhere in the stars, for some reason, decided to build a starship powered by steam.

SHARP: And that's impressive?

LORHROK: Do you have any idea how many hundreds of tons of coal you would have to burn, how much water you'd have to boil, to get just one second of the power the *Excelsior* produces with dilithium?

YUBARI: I'm afraid you're going to tell us.

(Sharp's tricorder detects something.)

SHARP: He's not going to have the chance. I'm getting lifesigns. Two. Very faint – there's some interference.

LORHROK: Can you get a location?

SHARP: Near the center of the ship.

YUBARI: The part with the hull breaches.

SHARP: The very same.

THE MAJOR: They must have been near the center of the null particle shockwave. The survivors might be able to tell us what happened.

LORHROK: No, they weren't near it, Major. This ship is the center. Otherwise it would have been completely destroyed. But how do you get null particles on a ship built with Industrial Age technology?

SHARP: Alecz...

LORHROK: Of course, sorry. Let's move!

(They move down the corridor at full speed.)

SCENE 403-05**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

ROL: Captain, it's getting serious. I can't compensate.

DOVAN: Understood. *Excelsior* to Away Team. There's some kind of interference at the center of the alien ship. We've lost transporter lock; proceed with caution.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Anything?

ROL: No, sir. We've lost contact.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Keep trying. Prep a rescue shuttle, just in case.

(Dovan presses a button on his console.)

DOVAN: All hands, yellow alert.

(Yellow alert klaxon.)

SCENE 403-06**LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP – CORRIDOR**

(Lorhrok turns a big iron wheel to unlock a large iron door – just like an ancient submarine hatch – and the door swings open. The Away Team follows him through.)

LORHROK: There it is again.

YUBARI: What?

LORHROK: Haven't you noticed? These doors we're going through. They're all locked – from the outside. I'm starting to worry about what's at the center of this spaceship.

(Yubari arms her phaser.)

YUBARI: Whatever it is, we'll be ready for it.

SHARP: There!

(She runs over to where two bodies lie on the ground.)

LORHROK: Do you recognize the species?

SHARP: No.

YUBARI: Are they dead?

SHARP: No, thank God. Just unconscious. I'll need a few minutes to bring both of them around.

LORHROK: Alright. We'll scout ahead. Major, guard Melissa. Yubari, with me.

THE MAJOR: Yes, sir!

(Lorhrok and Yubari continue to walk down the corridor. Dr. Sharp and her tricorder and medical work fade away as we get distance from them. The groans and creaks of the ship's steam-powered bowels get louder.)

LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP - BOWELS

LORHROK: Look at this, Yubari. More hull reinforcements. Seems like sixty percent of the ship is heavy doors and reinforced bulkheads.

YUBARI: If you were flying through space on steam power, without deflector shields – or even forcefields – wouldn't you want a lot of hull integrity?

LORHROK: If I were moving faster than light, no amount of metal would save me from micrometeors. And if I were moving at sublight – which I think this ship must have been – my biggest concern is radiation, and the external hull is more than enough for that. No, whoever built this ship was scared of something. Not something natural. Something... determined.

YUBARI: You mean, a prisoner?

LORHROK: ...Let's keep going.

LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP - CORRIDOR

(Sharp applies a hypospray to the necks of one of the wounded men.)

(Ryse groans.)

SHARP: Hi, friend. Don't try to move. You've got quite a few bruised ribs.

RYSE: Con wey... srubitan Palo? Where sur Palo?

SHARP: Your friend's right here. Don't talk. It's bad for your ribs, and the translator's still processing your language. Don't worry: we have a team headed for the core looking for other survivors.

RYSE: NO!

SHARP: What?

RYSE: Awlllen you INSANE?!

LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP - BOWELS

LORHROK: Gravity's getting weak. I think we're almost there. Alright. Cover me.

YUBARI: Already am.

(Yubari pulls out and recharges her phaser.)

(Lorhrok opens up the door and enters.)

LOCATION: THE CENTRAL HOLD

LORHROK: What is that?

YUBARI: You mean "who" "was" that.

LORHROK: What? That – Oh Maker. It looks like... like she exploded.

YUBARI: I see brain fragments on the rear wall. Those are parts of her small intestine. And I believe [those may be bones of her pelvis.]

LORHROK: Yubari. Enough.

LOCATION: ALIEN SHIP - CORRIDOR

RYSE: Are you trying to kill us all? Get them out! Whoever the hells you are, get them out of there!

SHARP: (talking over him) Calm down! You're hurting yourself!

RYSE: PALO! PALO! THEY'RE BREACHING THE CORE! PALO! YOU HAVE TO (Sharp injects him with a sedative) Stop! (Pause) ...them...

SHARP: Sorry, friend. Sharp to Lorhrok. (she hits her commbadge) (pause) Sharp to Yubari. (pause) Sharp to *Excelsior*. Come in. (pause) Major, go after them. Triple-time.

THE MAJOR: Yes, ma'am!

(The Major arms his phaser rifle as he runs for it.)

LOCATION: THE CENTRAL HOLD

LORHROK: Scan the area. What could have done this to her?

YUBARI: Scanning. It might take a few seconds to punch through the interference. (tricorder scan) Getting one life sign other than us.

LORHROK: Where?

YUBARI: Localizing. (tricorder processing) (stunned silence) That's not possible.

LORHROK: Yubari?

YUBARI: Sir, the lifesign I'm detecting. Sir, it's her. That woman's still alive.

LORHROK: That's... not possible.

YUBARI: I know that. You know that. I'm sure she knows that. She hardly even has a body anymore. But her body doesn't seem to know it. She. Is. Alive. She may even be conscious.

(Lorhrok starts walking forward again, still a bit slowly.)

LORHROK: Miss? Are you alright? Can you hear me?

(He kneels next to the body.)

YUBARI: Are you sure you want to touch her?

LORHROK: I don't think she's going to hurt me, Yubari. She's not really capable of it. (Pause) She's lying face-down. I'm turning her over. (Pause) Hi, there. My name's – (He gasps!)

(A screeching roar.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

(Intercom whistle.)

ROL: Sir! The interference just disappeared!

NEEVA: I have transporter locks!

DOVAN: Beam them all back now!

NEEVA: Dropping shields!

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR TRANSPORTER ROOM

(The team beams back.)

SHARP: I need these two survivors in sickbay! Marel!

LORTH: Sickbay, prepare for emergency site-to-site transport!

YUBARI: Lorhrok! Sir!

(Yubari grabs him. They both stumble.)

YUBARI: Major, help me!

(The Major runs over and helps Yubari.)

THE MAJOR: Lieutenant Lorhrok!

SHARP: Alecz — Alecz, are you alright?

THE MAJOR: Pulse is weak!

SHARP: Medkit!

YUBARI: I saw something on the ship — some kind of energy entering him.

LORTH: (In the background.) Sickbay, casualties transporting now!

(In the background, the two alien survivors are beamed to sickbay.)

(Lorhrok is breathing raggedly.)

LORHROK: Doctor.

SHARP: Marel Lorth, help me!

LORTH: Absolutely.

LORHROK: NO! (pause) No Trill. Doctor. Keep... away. Keep my species... away.

SHARP: Alecz, what? You're not making any sense.

LORHROK: away... from... me...

(Suddenly, his breathing is clear and normal. He talks in a low, clear, slow, confident tone.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Melissa Sharp. Drowning slowly. You will believe yourself alone, and that is all that will matter.

YUBARI: What was that? What did you say to her?

LORHROK-BRINGER: Asuka Yubari. In battle, of course.

YUBARI: Lieutenant Lorhrok!

(Lorhrok regains control, still gasping.)

LORHROK: I told you how you're going to die. Help me. (heavy exhale; passes out)

(Lorhrok's body hits the floor.)

SCENE 403-07**LOCATION: SPACE**

(Excelsior at station-keeping.)

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, Stardate Six-Oh-Three-Eight-One-Point-Four. With my First Officer unconscious in sickbay, I have brought the two alien survivors to the briefing room to explain their mission – and their bizzare derelict ship.*

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CONFERENCE ROOM

DOVAN: Sorry; you're saying you were attacked by... angels?

RYSE: The faculty of theology warned us that angels might try to prevent the mission. But it did not occur to any of us that they would pretend ignorance!

DOVAN: Ignorance? I thought the angels were attacking you.

PALO: You did!

DOVAN: We did?

RYSE: Finally, they admit it!

DOVAN: What?

SHARP: Alcar, I've been trying to tell you – these survivors believe we are... well, angels.

DOVAN: What, like, angels? From way... up there?

SHARP: As far as Ryse and Palo are concerned, Alcar, we are "way up there". From what I've gathered, their ship is the first thing their people have tried putting into space.

YUBARI: You're from that planet out there?

RYSE: No.

ROL: The one in the window?

RYSE: Was I not clear the first time? No.

DOVAN: I don't follow. Then where do you come from?

PALO: We are of the Underheaven.

SHARP: Underheaven, if I'm translating correctly, is a Class-M planet about... ..three-quarters of a light-year away.

DOVAN: Jehosephat. You guys don't do anything small, do you? Most people at least try putting a dog in orbit before breaking the lightspeed barrier.

PALO: Lightspeed? An absurdity – a trope of bad Aethereal writers.

ROL: Well, you didn't travel a light-year by burning carbon in a steam engine.

PALO: You have a better idea?

SHARP: How long have you been on this mission, Palo?

PALO: Three hundred seventy-five years.

YUBARI: ...What?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: (inhaling) Let's start from the beginning. Your people built a spaceship –

RYSE: An Aetherskimmer.

DOVAN: Sure. An Aetherskimmer. About the size of a medium asteroid. You armored it like a Klingon rhinoceros, loaded it up with enough coal to destroy Praxis, because you haven't even discovered chemical rockets yet, and launched your little death trap on its way with — how many crewmen?

PALO: There were four to begin with, plus the Bringer.

DOVAN: On a four-century mission to get to this other, perfectly habitable but basically ugly planet that hasn't done a thing to you or anybody else in a quarter of a million years. (Pause) I'm not going to ask how. No matter what you say, I'm not going to believe you. But what I'm dying to know is: why? The resources for this project must have cost every cent in your planet's economy for... decades. Why the rush? Why not wait a century or two until you have nuclear power?

RYSE: You know perfectly well why.

DOVAN: Yes, because I am — we all are — angels. Humor me. Explain it in your own words. Or I'll — I don't know, smite you or something.

ROL: I don't think angels smite.

DOVAN: Shut up, Bev.

ROL: Aye, sir.

RYSE: Is this some kind of test?

DOVAN: You tell me.

(Tense pause.)

RYSE: Palo...

PALO: You'll address your questions to me, Captain. We came into the Aether on a quest for the Second World for the same reason anyone Under Heaven does anything: to defeat Death.

DOVAN: Really? How? Do you think there's medicine on the surface?

SHARP: Maybe some kind of flora.

YUBARI: Or technology – something the Iconians left behind.

RYSE: They mock us, Palo.

PALO: I'm not sure, Ryse. Tell them the rest.

(Pause.)

RYSE: We intended to remove Death from her prison aboard the Aetherskimmer and leave her behind on the world below.

(Stunned silence.)

DOVAN: You lost me again.

(Ryse leaps to his feet.)

RYSE: Enough! Damn us, if you must, but you will not make sport of us!

SHARP: Ryse. Calm down. We're just confused. Please...

(Intercom whistle.)

NURSE HENNESSY: *Doctor Sharp to Sickbay! Medical emergency!*

(Sharp slaps her combadge as she jumps to her feet.)

SHARP: On my way!

DOVAN: Doc, I'm on your six.

(They both run for the doors.)

DOVAN: Yubari! Bring the Undertakers!

YUBARI: The what?

DOVAN: The aliens, Lieutenant, double time!

(Door closes behind Sharp and Dovan.)

YUBARI: Come with me. Quickly.

PALO: We do not wish it.

(She unholsters and charges her phaser.)

YUBARI: Have you ever seen one of these before?

RYSE: No.

(Yubari fires the phaser into the wall!)

YUBARI: That was the stun setting. Won't kill you. But it'll give you one hell of a headache, and the Prime Directive forbids me from giving you an aspirin.

PALO: I... see your point, Lieutenant. We'll join you.

SCENE 403-08**LOCATION: SICKBAY**

(Life-monitoring systems are going crazy.)

SHARP: I need forty ceecee's trellium-K!

(Hennessy fumbling with the controls on the hypospray.)

SHARP: Mike!

NURSE HENNESSY: Forty ceecee's trellium-K! Here!

(Hypospray injection.)

SHARP: She isn't stabilizing.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Melissa, it's pointless.

SHARP: Keep Lorhrok restrained! And shut him up, while you're at it! Mike, neural clamps!

NURSE HENNESSY: Neural clamps.

(Sharp works with medical tools at the biobed continuously in the background as the scene continues.)

(The doors slide open and Dovan, Yubari, and the aliens bust in.)

DOVAN: What's happening?! Neeva!

NEEVA: Sir, it was Alecz — I mean, Lieutenant Lorhrok. Teela Ob was in critical but stable condition, then Alecz came around.

DOVAN: And what?

NEEVA: And he seemed okay! He was saying strange things, and his voice... But he was physically fit to stand. And, when he did, he touched Ensign Ob – he said that her time had “run its course.”

DOVAN: And?

NEEVA: And that’s all, sir. He touched her, and half a dozen alarms went off. They won’t let me near him, and he won’t talk to me.

(The patient flatlines.)

SHARP: Dammit all to hell. (pause) She’s dead.

NURSE HENNESSY: Melissa, we might still be able to save the symbiont.

SHARP: No, we can’t.

NURSE HENNESSY: That’s no way to talk, Doctor. You can’t give up on her!

SHARP: Mike, I lost the symbiont five minutes ago.

NURSE HENNESSY: Oh my God.

SHARP: Four lifetimes of experience... (pause) Captain, you can come in now. It’s over.

DOVAN: Yubari, Mister Palo, Mister Ryse. Please join me.

(They all step forward.)

SHARP: Mike, note time of death. Document everything; the Trill Symbiosis Commission will tear this place apart when they investigate. They’ll want heads for this. (Pause) And shut off that biobed.

(A nurse presses a key and the flatline noise stops)

SHARP: God dammit.

RYSE: What point are you trying to make, Captain? We know that angels do not die.

DOVAN: No, angels don't die! But we do! We do, Ryse! (Pause) Now, please, a little respect for the late Ensign Teela Ob.

(A moment of silence.)

RYSE: I don't... understand.

PALO: But we are sorry, Captain.

DOVAN: Good for you. Now, between you and your friend, the Doc, and Lieutenant Lorhrok over there, maybe somebody can tell me what the hell just happened.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You of all people know what just happened, sir. She was dying of chemical burns. Events took their natural course.

SHARP: She's dead, Lieutenant! There's nothing natural about that! In fact, from where I was standing, it looked like just the opposite!

NEEVA: Is that some kind of accusation?

DOVAN: Everyone: calm down. That's an order. Number One, [why don't you take it from the top?]

RYSE: Palo, look. Look at this "Lieutenant Lorhrok"'s eyes.

PALO: The Bringer. The Bringer survives!

RYSE: Then our mission —

PALO: is not yet failed.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Palo. Attempted murder.

RYSE: Shut up, you wretch!

NEEVA: The Bringer? You looked at Alecz and called him The Bringer.

LORHROK-BRINGER: The Universal Translator is missing a few key phenomes, Neeva. You'd more likely call me... the Reaper.

DOVAN: I'd call you Aleczahnder Lorhrok, Lieutenant. Because that's who you are.

PALO: Not any longer, Captain. Your Lieutenant has become something more.

RYSE: Something less.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Neither more nor less, Ryse. Different. Alecz Lorhrok is gone, and he will not return. But I am just another creature of the cosmos. In order to flourish, I do what I must.

DOVAN: And what exactly is that?

LORHROK-BRINGER: I end lives, Captain. I am Death, the Bringer of endings, the Reaper of harvests. And it is time for me to continue my work.

SCENE 403-09**LOCATION: NARRATIVE EMPTINESS**

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, Supplemental. Lieutenant Lorhrok has been inhabited by some kind of energy being, and now claims to be the personification of Death – the Grim Reaper himself. Our guests, Palo and Ryse, seem to agree. I've ordered sickbay evacuated while Doctor Sharp runs a full battery on our first officer.*

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CONFERENCE ROOM

DOVAN: You're telling me, Mister Ryse, that no one on your planet has ever died unless they physically touch this... Bringer?

RYSE: Yes, physical contact with the Bringer's current host. How would anyone die, otherwise? A body can be injured, but it cannot be destroyed.

YUBARI: You say that, but I could throw you in a fire and let you burn away to ashes.

RYSE: But I wouldn't burn away – unless the Bringer arrives. Serious burns, of course, great pain... but death? No! What are you?

DOVAN: We're as confused as you are, Ryse. If we are hurt badly enough, we will die.

PALO: In our world, only the Bringer itself can be injured unto death.

NEEVA: Wait – you can kill the Bringer? Why haven't you?

PALO: The Bringer flees the corpse and inhabits a new host. Someone nearby, if possible; otherwise, it dominates a newborn child, no matter how far away. Either way, the cycle begins anew.

RYSE: That's why we are here. How can angels be so ignorant? I don't understand.

(Sharp walks in.)

SHARP: Alcar, I've finished my analysis of Alecz Lorhrok. You're not gonna like it.

NEEVA: Your report, Doctor.

DOVAN: Yes. Your report.

(Sharp presses some keys and a medical display appears on a wall screen, faintly pulsing in time to Lorhrok's regular heartbeat.)

SHARP: This is a radiation map of Alecz's body.

NEEVA: It looks good! Very little radiation at all.

SHARP: Exactly. The human body emits some radiation. Light, heat, even eating a banana pumps out a few picosieverts... but I'm not seeing any of it. If it weren't for all the other evidence, I'd say Lorhrok is not only dead, but actually disintegrated.

DOVAN: Then what are we seeing, Melissa?

SHARP: That's the part you're not gonna like. In the end, I got stellar cartography to take a look, and they confirmed: Alecz Lorhrok's body has been converted entirely to null particles. That's what killed Teela Ob: when he touched her, he released a few of them into her brain. They did just enough damage to finish her off, then dissipated into the ship.

ROL: Speaking of the ship — if Mister Lorhrok has been nullified, he should drop right through the deck plating into space. Then explode.

SHARP: There's some kind of very thin E.M. field between his skin and everything else.

DOVAN: But [how could he be completely converted like that?]

SHARP: Don't ask; I don't have answers yet.

RYSE: I'm sorry you have lost your friend.

NEEVA: We haven't lost him yet, Mister Ryse.

PALO: My executive means no disrespect, Lieutenant Commander.

ROL: Commander Neeva: what would happen if a deep alpha beam struck a seventy-kilogram mass of null particles protected by a thin E.M. shell?

NEEVA: Well, it'd go right through the shell. At low intensities, the alpha beam would repel the null particles.

ROL: What about at high intensities?

NEEVA: Incomplete annihilation. I'd have to do some math to work out the initial geometries, but pretty soon you'd have a shockwave as big as...

ROL: As big as the one that almost destroyed us today?

NEEVA: Just about, yes.

DOVAN: You two are figuring something out, but I don't know what it is.

NEEVA: The null particle shockwave, sir. The Aetherskimmer entered orbit this morning. I'll bet they were scanned, just like we were, by a deep alpha beam, just like we were. And when that beam hit The Bringer...

ROL: Boom.

PALO: So it was an accident? You didn't attack us?

DOVAN: No, of course we didn't attack you. We came to rescue you.

YUBARI: The Bringer's host... that poor woman... she exploded. And the Bringer kept her alive long enough to find another nearby host.

DOVAN: So when Lorhrok showed up...

ROL: The Bringer escaped into him.

DOVAN: And now he goes around murdering any injured Trills he sees, starting with Teela Ob.

NEEVA: That's not Alecz Lorhrok, Captain.

DOVAN: I know that, Neeva. But whatever it is has Alecz and has him good. You and Mister Rol: find a way to get it out of him. Deep alpha beams sound like a good place to start.

PALO: Please, Captain, I beg you not to do that. I am sorry about your angel-friend. But if you drive the Bringer out of him, you must recognize the cost. The Bringer would flee to inhabit a new body.

DOVAN: To you or Ryse?

PALO: Neither. Your friend fell victim only because he was so very close to the Bringer. Otherwise, the Bringer would have returned to the Underheaven, and the dyings would have resumed.

RYSE: They'd accelerate. The Bringer has been locked up in the Aetherskimmer for four hundred years. He'd have a lot of catching up to do. My daughter wouldn't survive the first night.

NEEVA: Your daughter?

RYSE: Yes. She suffers a severe imbalance of the humours. Even as we prepared to launch the Aetherskimmer, the signs were clear: the Bringer would soon be visiting her. That's why I volunteered.

ROL: And you took the Bringer out here. To strand it?

PALO: Yes. We have sometimes imprisoned the Bringer, but our greatest walls crumble before its power within a year and a day. Our finest natural philosophers plotted the position of the Second World. Tradition states that the Bringer came from this place, long ago, at the end of an age of fire. And so, our people resolved to send the Bringer home, where it can never harm us again.

DOVAN: I don't get it. If what you're saying is true, all the Bringer has to do to go back to your planet is get its host killed. Set it loose in an Iconian ruin, and I don't think it'll take long to figure it out.

PALO: The Bringer cannot leave the Second World – not without using powers that have long faded from the universe.

YUBARI: Who says?

RYSE: It has been proved.

DOVAN: By theologians?

NEEVA: Actually, sir... I think they're right. The Shroud we discovered earlier? It'd reflect null energy back to the surface. The Bringer's energy field would be trapped on that planet.

ROL: And so would anything else we send down there.

PALO: Our theologians are not simpletons, Captain Dovan. I would not have volunteered if they were.

DOVAN: You volunteered, too? Why? For a loved one?

PALO: I was at the last battle, Captain, when we captured the Bringer. We staged a war, between two of our most powerful nations, gave the Bringer a target he couldn't resist. Then we turned on him. (Pause) I've always been terrified of Death. I was there when the Bringer took my parents. They tried to hide their fear, for my sake, but still... my parents ended before my eyes. And when I saw that battle... (Pause) The Bringer gradually grows in power,

and he had been that host for decades. Whole regiments charged, volleyed... died. I watched, and there was nothing I could do.

ROL: So you're here for revenge.

PALO: No. I'm here because of what I realized that day: I must never, ever die.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Rol, you have work to do. You and Neeva are dismissed.

YUBARI: What about us, sir?

DOVAN: Hm. Not every day I get the chance to talk to a metaphysical anthropomorphization. Lieutenant, show Palo and Ryse to quarters, then [join me in sickbay.]

ADOW: Medical emergency in the starboard nacelle! Captain Dovan to starboard nacelle control!

(Sharp has already bolted for the door.)

DOVAN: Melissa, go! Yubari, move Lorhrok to a private room and double the guard on him!

(And then he runs after Sharp.)

SCENE 403-10**LOCATION: NACELLE CONTROL**

(A warp field containment klaxon is ringing.)

ADOW: Jalin Tigan, listen to me! That's an open plasma vent! If you jump through that forcefield...!

JALIN TIGAN: I'll be killed. I'm a warp field engineer, boss. I know exactly what I'm doing.

ADOW: Well, get back here, then! You're still covered in burns! You idiot, you should be in sickbay!

JALIN TIGAN: This is one of the least idiotic things I've ever done. My wife is dead, boss.

ADOW: Commander J'naya... I'm not... He's going to jump into the plasma vent if you don't put those pips to good use and do something. (Pause) Please.

J'NAYA: I'll try.

LOCATION: LORHROK'S PRIVATE ROOM

YUBARI: You'll be staying here for the next little while.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Next little while... sir.

YUBARI: I answer to Lieutenant Alecz Lorhrok. Not... whatever you are.

LORHROK-BRINGER: I am that man, and more. We are... joined, in a sense.

YUBARI: The man I know would never have harmed anyone – much less a defenseless, wounded shipmate. Don't you have better people to kill?

LORHROK-BRINGER: Better people?

YUBARI: Okay, worse people. The ones who deserve it!

LORHROK-BRINGER: Ah! You understand my purpose then, Leftenant. That takes great wisdom. What you do not realize is that that is exactly what I do.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: When Neeva and Rol finish that machine to drive you out of Alecz's body, remind me to make you eat those words.

LORHROK-BRINGER: I must go.

YUBARI: You're not going back to sickbay.

LORHROK-BRINGER: No. Jalin Tigan. I must go to him.

LOCATION: NACELLE CONTROL

J'NAYA: Ehm... Petty Officer Tigan. You're a petty officer, right? (Pause) Jalin. We haven't had much time to get to know each other yet, but I already know there are a lot of people here who care about you. Please [talk to some of them.]

JALIN TIGAN: The first time I asked Teela to marry me, I was six years old. She thought I was joking. She thought I was saying she'd never become Joined to a symbiont.

(Dovan and Sharp run through the door.)

ADOW: Captain.

DOVAN: We have to get up there and stop him.

SHARP: No! If you make a move like that, he'll jump. Listen.

JALIN TIGAN: Symbiosis was Teela's dream. It took me decades to convince her that my dream didn't mean the end of hers. Captain, is that you?

LOCATION: LORHROK'S PRIVATE ROOM

YUBARI: Back away from the door.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You do not understand. I am needed elsewhere on this ship. Jalin Tigan [must be brought to his full.]

YUBARI: Is a Trill, and my orders are — one — to keep you away from the rest of the crew, and — two — especially other Trill. (Pause) You just murdered his wife. You can't already be hungry again.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Get out of my way.

YUBARI: Guard. Phasers.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-1: Yes, Lieutenant.

(Both Yubari and her fellow guard draw and charge phasers.)

YUBARI: Step. Away.

LOCATION: NACELLE CONTROL

SHARP: Can we shut down the engines?

KESTRA: Engineering is working on it, but it'll take three more minutes to finish venting the plasma.

DOVAN: Mister Tigan, your wife wouldn't want you to do this.

JALIN TIGAN: My wife is dead, Captain. What she wants doesn't matter anymore. That's... kind of the point.

DOVAN: Mister Tigan, I'm ordering you to step away from that forcefield and close the blast door.

JALIN TIGAN: Captain, you'll find I transmitted my resignation to you just over an hour ago.

ADOW: Dammit, Jalin, don't do this!

JALIN TIGAN: Life is about choices, boss. I do not choose to live in a world without my wife Teela. I hope you find some way to respect that.

SHARP: Jalin...

JALIN TIGAN: Good-bye.

(He leaps through the forcefield! The beam catches him and burns away most of his flesh, cooks his internal organs. He screams until his lungs burst.)

SHARP: Why would anyone choose to die this way?

KESTRA: He should have been vaporized before he even reached the vent. It should have been painless.

(A moment after the screaming ends, the plasma vent pushes his now-charred body out of the beam. It flies back through the forcefield and all the way across the room, where it lands with a sickening thud.)

LOCATION: LORHROK'S PRIVATE ROOM

LORHROK-BRINGER: It's happening now! Can't you see what must be done?

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-1: Lieutenant, the door. The whole room. It's starting to... I don't know!

YUBARI: It's losing cohesion, Mister Wells! The Bringer is trying to escape. I can see through that wall; another minute and he'll be able to walk through it! (Pause) Fire.

(They simultaneously fire their phasers at Lohrok.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: NO! I will not be denied!

YUBARI: Fire!

(They renew their blasts. Lohrok collapses to the bed with a thunk.)

YUBARI: Cease fire! He's down!

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-1: What was that?

YUBARI: I don't know. But if he gets any stronger, I'm not sure we can stop him from doing it.

LOCATION: NACELLE CONTROL

DOVAN: I... don't think you need to check for lifesigns, Melissa. There's not much left.

ADOW: Get that door closed, Thiripol! And cancel alert status!

(Sharp's tricorder starts scanning.)

KESTRA: I, ehm... sir, may I be excused?

DOVAN: Of course. Dismissed. You too, Adow.

SHARP: Alcar... (The tricorder beeps) He's alive.

DOVAN: That's... I suppose that's good news.

SHARP: I can't imagine how he'll ever regain consciousness. All his internal organs have been cooked away. He only stopped screaming because his lungs burst.

DOVAN: The Bringer.

SHARP: What?

DOVAN: Tigan was — is a Trill, just like his wife. Just like ten percent of our crew. Just like Alec Lorhrok — who is now the Bringer.

SHARP: You mean... you think Jalin isn't capable of dying anymore?

DOVAN: Not without help, Melissa. Not without help.

SCENE 403-11**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* is in orbit.)

NEEVA: *Operations Log, supplemental. My work with Mister Rol is going well, but we need to gather specific data on the Bringer if we're going to force it out of Lieutenant Lorhrok.*

LOCATION: LORHROK'S PRIVATE ROOM

(Neeva is running scans using tricorders and various other implements big and small.)

NEEVA: If you'll just hold still, then, Alecz...

LORHROK-BRINGER: The forcefield gives me little choice.

NEEVA: It speaks! Twenty minutes and that's what I get from you? Sarcasm? (Pause) Of course it is. (Pause) I expected I'd walk in here and you'd tell me my cause of death before I was halfway to your bedside.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Do you want that?

NEEVA: I didn't think it mattered what I wanted. (Pause) Almost like there's a little Alecz in there after all.

LORHROK-BRINGER: I keep something of everyone I touch.

NEEVA: You mean kill.

LORHROK-BRINGER: If you prefer.

(Neeva presses a few buttons and the forcefield drops, then immediately relaunches.)

NEEVA: Put out your arm. I've adjusted the forcefield to allow it.

LORHROK-BRINGER: I will, if you tell me how fares Jalin Tigan. I know his heart still beats. And many more – far, far away. So far that I cannot hear them over the sound of Jalin Tigan... living.

NEEVA: This isn't a negotiating session.

LORHROK-BRINGER: It is now.

NEEVA: Have we talked about our old postings? Did we have that date yet? Because you should know that my second posting was to the Quartermaster's Depot on Newburgh. I ran the forcefields.

(Neeva keys in some commands.)

NEEVA: If I want your arm extended... then I'm... gonna... extend it.

(The forcefield adjusts several times in rapid succession.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: (grunts) That is an... interesting device.

NEEVA: You never really had a choice. It's just that Starfleet protocol demands I be polite to alien species. Even the murdering ones.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Is it really better to keep Jalin alive? I know his pain.

NEEVA: Not my call.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You'd have the captain decide?

(Pause.)

NEEVA: You know... a few months ago I might have. But now...? I think it's above him, too.

(She resumes the work.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: What happened?

NEEVA: Simon happened, Alecz. (Pause) Oh, I see you don't like to think about Simon, do you? Maybe there's more Lorhrok in there than you're letting on.

LORHROK-BRINGER: He blames you for it, you know. Not out loud. Not even to himself. But there's a part of Alecz Lorhrok that will always, always hate you for making him take the shot that killed Simon Westlake.

NEEVA: That's funny; I thought you said Lorhrok was dead.

LORHROK-BRINGER: That's all you have to say about the boy who died saving your life?

NEEVA: He was dying anyway. (Pause) Yeah, Alecz doesn't want to hear that, but it's the truth. Simon's Elarin's Syndrome had come back. It was going to eat him away until there was nothing left but a shell. Then it was going to keep that shell breathing for a few more months. Just to be cruel. (Pause) In some ways... in a lot of ways, Simon was lucky.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Yet you prevent Jalin Tigan from enjoying that same luck.

NEEVA: No, you don't get it! Simon Westlake was lucky because he got the chance to change a meaningless death into one that mattered — a death that saved both our lives. (Pause) That's the whole point of... of you. I don't want you to take away our suffering. I just need Death because you give our suffering a meaning.

(Pause.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Ha-ah. Then you understand the purpose of my existence. A rare thing, Commander. You're as wise as Alecz believed.

NEEVA: I'm flattered. Now give me your other arm so I can work on better ways to stop you.

(The door hisses open.)

NEEVA: Hello? Who's there?

RYSE: I didn't think anyone else would be here!

NEEVA: Ryse?

RYSE: I believe you're called Lieutenant Commander Neeva? Lieutenant Commander Neeva, lower the forcefield and step away from the Bringer.

(Pause.)

(Then Ryse charges a phaser.)

RYSE: I believe this weapon is armed, Lieutenant Commander Neeva.

NEEVA: It's set to disintegrate. That would kill me.

RYSE: I'm not convinced of that, but I know it'll hurt. The forcefield, please.

(Pause.)

RYSE: Please.

(Neeva presses some buttons; the forcefield drops.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Hello, Ryse.

NEEVA: Okay, you've got him. Now what's your play?

RYSE: The Bringer's been trying to kill my daughter for hundreds of years. It can't stay here. You have no idea how powerful he'll become; he'll tear you apart. Then he'll go back Underheaven and my daughter will die. The planet's the only safe place for him. For any of us.

NEEVA: We won't let you take him.

RYSE: You angels aren't as smart as I thought you were. I think we have a chance.

NEEVA: Alecz is one of ours. We wouldn't give up.

RYSE: He's the Bringer. Nothing more. Sooner or later you'll understand that.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You'd never return, Ryse. Alone on the Second World, with no one but me for company. You wouldn't even have the mercy of death to free you.

RYSE: But my daughter wouldn't face your "mercy," either. I'll take my chances. Now move!

LORHROK-BRINGER: No.

RYSE: I have the gun.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You held me prisoner for four hundred years. I will not be imprisoned by you again for all eternity.

RYSE: Then I will burn down that body until I can carry what's left of you with me!

NEEVA: RYSE, NO!

(Ryse pulls the trigger on the phaser.)

(But something strange happens.)

NEEVA: What in the nine hells? The phaser beam is twisting!

RYSE: Oh, no.

LORHROK-BRINGER

Oh, yes, Ryse.

(The beam completes and strikes Ryse in the abdomen, full force.)

RYSE: Agggh!

(He's flung back into the corridor.)

NEEVA: Ryse!

(Neeva reactivates the forcefield with two clicks.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Agh! No! Drop the forcefield!

(Neeva runs into the corridor. She smacks her combadge.)

NEEVA: Medical emergency! Deck 11, Junction Two-F! [to Ryse] Ryse!

RYSE: He's already... too powerful.

(He loses consciousness.)

NEEVA: Hang on, Ryse. Help is on the way. Ryse!

(Sharp comes running around the corner.)

SHARP: Neeva, out of my way!

NEEVA: It's Ryse! He's been shot!

SHARP: I can see that!

(She crouches by his side.)

SHARP: No pulse. (Pause) We'll do what we can. Transporter Room, two to beam directly to sickbay!

LORTH: *Right quick, Melissa.*

(They beam out.)

(Pause.)

(Neeva stands up, walks back into the room.)

NEEVA: I thought they couldn't die. Not without your touch.

LORHROK-BRINGER: (sigh) You're right. They can't. If you don't allow me to attend to him... Ryse will survive.

NEEVA: You tried your best. You bent that phaser beam into him, which is impossible. And Ryse said you were only getting more powerful. How long before you don't need my approval to walk through that forcefield?

(Pause.)

NEEVA: I'm waiting.

LORHROK-BRINGER: In all the cosmos, Neeva, you will never find a creature better accustomed to waiting than the one who stands before you. I can wait until the last star in the last galaxy in the last universe goes out. (Pause) You can't wait another five seconds.

(Pause for four seconds.)

NEEVA: If we're going to finish our weapon, I have to get this data back to Rol.

(Neeva turns and exits.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Or even four.

SCENE 403-12**LOCATION: READY ROOM**

(Dovan is working on a PADD.)

(Rol barges in.)

ROL

Captain —

(Dovan keeps working on his PADD.)

DOVAN: I have a doorbell, you know.

ROL: Sir, I have some bad news.

DOVAN: Then get out of my office and bring back good news, Bev.

ROL: Alright. (Pause) The weapon works.

(Dovan finally puts down his PADD and looks up.)

DOVAN: That is good news.

ROL: But it won't destroy the Bringer.

DOVAN: Then in what sense is it a "weapon"?

ROL: It'll drive it out of him. Out of Alecz, I mean.

DOVAN: And what happens then?

ROL: Sir?

DOVAN: Where does the Bringer go? It's a cloud of null particles and you just told me we can't destroy it. So where does it go when its evicted from our first officer?

ROL: The aliens think it'll return to their homeworld. That it'll find a baby to become its new host.

DOVAN: They also said they got that theory from theologians. We're scientists, Rol; give me science. Where does the Bringer go when we hit it with your gun?

ROL: I don't know. I'm sure it'll find someone. If Lieutenant Lorhrok's any indication, it'll probably jump right in to anyone nearby – within a meter or so.

DOVAN: And then the Trill would start dying normally again, but some other species would suddenly be subject to the Bringer. Right?

ROL: That's our best guess.

DOVAN: Your best guess. (Pause) This is ridiculous. I have no idea how any of this works, I can't follow what I've been told in the past hour, and it changes every five minutes anyway. I feel like I'm playing a five-sided chess game with Death, and he's the only one who knows the rules.

ROL: So, just like every other day.

DOVAN: Hm. Good point. (Pause) This weapon you and Neeva built.

ROL: The deep alpha [dispersal device.]

DOVAN: Yeah, that one. It works like a gun? I just point and shoot?

ROL: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: Get it ready for field use, and clear Cargo Bay 2. We'll beam the Bringer there when we're ready.

ROL: You're going to use the gun on Lieutenant Lorhrok? You'll drive the Bringer out of him.

DOVAN: Assuming your gun works.

ROL: And what if the Bringer does go back to Palo and Ryse's homeworld? Millions of people could die.

DOVAN: Isn't that what the Prime Directive says should happen?

ROL: It doesn't... feel right.

DOVAN: Odd to hear that coming from you, Rol. The Prime Directive rarely does. (Pause) Good thing I never cared much for it. I'll be firing your gun at Alecz from point-blank range. If there's one ounce of good luck in this universe, the Bringer will go into me. Alecz is free, you beam me to the planet and get out of here, and I live out eternity down there, possessed by the Bringer.

ROL: Trapped.

DOVAN: But secure in the knowledge that I, Captain Alcar Dovan, am the first person in the history of the cosmos to literally defeat Death. (Pause) I can live with that. Or die with it, I suppose. Either way, it's good for my ego.

ROL: If I quoted the twenty-six regulations you'd be violating by putting yourself in harm's way, would that deter you?

DOVAN: Do you want it to?

ROL: I'm just curious. I'll relay your orders.

DOVAN: Thank you, Bev. Dismissed.

(The doorbell chimes.)

DOVAN: Ah, just in time. Come!

(Rol exits. Palo enters.)

ROL: Mister Palo.

PALO: Captain Dovan. You asked to see me?

DOVAN: Yes, I did. Sit down.

PALO: You have to get him off the ship, Captain.

DOVAN: Excuse me?

PALO: The Bringer. What my friend Ryse did was reckless and foolish. It'll be a long time before he wakes up. But he was right: the Bringer is too powerful. You have to put him off this ship now or he'll destroy it.

DOVAN: Then help me do that.

PALO: Please, tell me how.

DOVAN: Why are you here, Palo? On this mission?

PALO: I don't want to die. And I don't see your point.

DOVAN: You don't want to die, so you locked yourself up on a flying death-trap with Death herself for four centuries hoping that your theologians were right. It's a big risk. The smart money would have stayed home.

PALO: I couldn't risk that, either. If I hadn't come, someone else would have been in charge. Someone else might have let the crew waver, or turned around in the face of danger. It wasn't an easy trip, you know. My life would have been in someone else's hands. And someone else might have gotten it wrong.

DOVAN: Someone like me.

PALO: I... didn't mean that, precisely.

DOVAN: It's alright, Palo. You spent four centuries flying here and now, in the final hours of your mission, we bump into you and I'm stuck with it instead.

PALO: I admit, I never really believed in angels until now. Mostly because I never liked the idea of them.

DOVAN: I know what you mean. A bunch of meddling, capricious eavesdroppers. When I was a kid, I tried to modify a tricorder to detect angels, so I could beat them up.

PALO: (a soft chuckle) Well, when you put it that way... (Pause) We're not so different, are we?

DOVAN: Let's find out. I invited you up here to make you an offer, Palo.

PALO: I have no idea what that could mean at this late hour. I'm intrigued.

DOVAN: My officers have designed a weapon that can be used against the Bringer.

PALO: Thanks be to God. Like your phasers. You'll destroy him?

DOVAN: Not exactly. This gun will target the Bringer's energy field. It will drive him — it — out of my First Officer.

PALO: But you can't do that. The Bringer will go back to my people! It will take another host! Death wins! You can't do that!

DOVAN: I will if I must. Becoming immortal is your planet's problem. Saving Alecz Lorhrok is mine. (Pause) Still, I hope it doesn't come down to that. Here's where my offer comes in.

(Pause.)

PALO: Alright. What do you have in mind?

DOVAN: I'm inviting you to come with me. When I shoot the Bringer, you could be standing next to it. Within one meter – practically hugging it. And when the Bringer floated out of Alecz Lorhrok...

PALO: It would... Captain, the Bringer would take me as its next host!

DOVAN: If we're lucky, yes. I get my officer back. You complete your mission, we leave you behind, and the Underheaven never knows Death ever again. What'd you say?

(Pause.)

PALO: I would die.

DOVAN: I know. I'm sorry. We weren't able to find a way to destroy the Bringer. But we're out of time. I... wish we had some other way.

PALO: Leave your officer Lorhrok behind! Abandon this weapon of yours and accept what fate has done to him!

DOVAN: Alecz Lorhrok is an innocent bystander who was taken by the Bringer while he was fishing you and the survivors of your crew out of the wreckage of the Aetherskimmer. He has no responsibility to die for the sake of your mission. He will not die for your mission and that is final. You, however, are the captain of your ship and the last person on the mission to strand the Bringer. I'm giving you one chance – and this is the only chance you'll get – to end it once and for all. Do your duty. Save Ryse's daughter. I'm sure she's beautiful. This is what you signed up for, Palo, and I am giving you the chance to be the greatest hero your world – perhaps any world – has ever seen.

(Pause.)

PALO: But I would die.

DOVAN: So what? We're captains. That's the job description.

PALO: You're... insane.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: And you're a coward.

(Pause.)

PALO: If you insist on killing the whole world, Dovan, I request that you allow me to return there.

DOVAN: If you insist on letting your world die? Permission granted. Mister Rol will see that you're beamed back to your ship. You have a long journey ahead of you.

PALO: But... if you took me home on your ship, it would only take a few hours.

DOVAN: I'm afraid that would violate the Prime Directive.

PALO: The flight is four centuries! My ship is damaged! Ryse is my only companion!

DOVAN: Ah, I'm afraid not. Because he sustained injuries while under our protection, the Prime Directive demands we see to his good health. And, since you will have departed already, we'll have no choice but to return him to the Underheaven ourselves. (Pause) You'll be heading home alone.

(Pause.)

PALO: You're a spiteful man, Captain.

DOVAN: Think of it this way: it'll be three hundred seventy-five years before the Bringer gets another crack at you. Isn't that what you wanted? Not to die?

PALO: Good night, Captain Dovan.

(He exits. Dovan presses a button on his desk. The intercom boops.)

DOVAN: Dovan to Rol. Inform transporter room to expect Mister Palo. He's returning to his ship.

ROL: *Right away. But, Captain – he's very angry. I can't guess why, since you're sacrificing yourself to save him and his planet – Is there anything else I need to know about?*

DOVAN: I didn't tell him.

ROL: *What was that, sir?*

DOVAN: I didn't tell him I'm sacrificing myself. I gave him the chance to take my place, and, when he said no... well, I got my back up.

ROL: *Do you want me to tell him?*

DOVAN: No, let him stew. It'll make the surprise that much sweeter when he gets home. Until then, I want him to think about it.

ROL: *Aye, sir. Transporter Room Ten is ready for Palo. And we're ready to transport the Bringer to the planet.*

DOVAN: I'm coming. Dovan out.

SCENE 403-13**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

PALO: Excuse me.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-2: Mister Palo! I believe you've lost your way.

PALO: This room here – that's where you're keeping the Bringer?

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-2: Well, yes... it's a restricted area. Security's inside, [making final preparations for transport.]

(Palo PUNCHES him in the jaw!)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-2: Uuuh!

(The guard goes down hard.)

(Palo leans over and extracts... the guard's PHASER. He charges it up and crosses into Lorhrok's room.)

LOCATION: LORHROK'S PRIVATE ROOM

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-1: Ken? Is that – Aggh!

(He's hit by a phaser beam.)

(Palo fires again immediately, striking the other guard!)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-3: Aggh!

PALO: Bringer.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Palo.

PALO: If I let you out of that forcefield, you'll destroy this ship.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Do you want me to?

PALO: You'd be able to correct the error of Jalin Tigan.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Do you want me to?

PALO: Yes.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Are you certain? This host would survive. I would leave the wreckage of this ship and board yours. I would destroy you and return to my home in the Underheaven.

PALO: Yes, you would. If you caught me before I got underway. But if I depart fast enough, you'll fall into the gravity of the Second World and end up on its surface, burned but intact, trapped for eternity like we planned.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You're proposing that we race.

PALO: You want to go home, right? Here's your chance. Just you and me: a contest of wits and prowess. First one off this ship lives.

(Pause.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Release the forcefield.

PALO: May the best man win.

(He fires at the forcefield control panel it drops.)

PALO: There. You're free. Clock starts now. Goodbye, Bringer.

(Palo runs out.)

SCENE 403-14**LOCATION: CARGO BAY 2**

DOVAN: So, just point and shoot?

(Neeva charges up a very big gun.)

NEEVA: Just point and shoot.

DOVAN: Very nice. Good work, Commander.

NEEVA: Thank you, sir. And, Captain — let me just say that's been an honor.

DOVAN: Come again?

NEEVA: I know you're not planning to walk out of here.

DOVAN: How? The only one I told was Rol. If he can't keep a secret, who can?

NEEVA: He kept your secret, sir. But I'm your Chief of Operations, and I am very good at my job. (Pause) And you're very good at yours, Captain. I... I just want to say "Thank you." You're doing a good thing.

DOVAN: Hasn't really sunk in for me yet. And, for that matter, I don't intend to let it.

NEEVA: Remember: once we've beamed the Bringer into this cargo bay, you need to get as close as you can before you fire. Within a meter. Otherwise, it might just go back to Underheaven, instead of into you.

DOVAN: Thanks, Neeva. Now get out of here. Mister Lorth, is the cargo transporter ready?

LORTH: Yes, sir!

DOVAN: Energize! And then I want you out of here, too!

(Lorth presses some buttons, slides the transporter slidy thing, the transporter starts up... and then the beam flickers, garbles, and dies.)

DOVAN: Uh, Chief? I'm not seeing the Bringer.

LORTH: Sir... the transport... failed.

NEEVA: What? Report.

(Lorth works his console frantically.)

LORTH: It's the Bringer, sirs. He's not in his cell. (Sensor alerts) He's on Deck Thirteen! Heading for the commons!

NEEVA: Re-establish lock!

LORTH: I can't! He's a cloud of null particles who can bend local reality, ma'am — we were lucky to get him when he was surrounded by a battery of pattern enhancers.

DOVAN: Red alert. Security to the recreation commons! Neeva, with me.

(They hurry out.)

SCENE 403-15**LOCATION: TRANSPORTER ROOM 10**

(Red alert.)

(Palo enters.)

PALO: Excuse me. This is Transporter Room Ten?

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-4: Yes, Mister Palo. But [transporters are shut down because of the alert].

PALO: Please transport me back to my ship so I can get underway. Your captain has given the authorization.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-4: I'm sorry, sir: transporter use is impossible during a red alert. You should return to your quarters and wait for the all-clear.

PALO: It's imperative I return to my ship immediately.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-4: There's nothing I can do, sir. If we tried to beam you with the shields still up, your particles would be scattered across half a light-year.

PALO: Let's try something else.

(Palo pulls out his phaser and charges it.)

PALO: Beam me out of here or I'll shoot you.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #403-4: Security to Transporter Room Ten! Emergenc – aaagh!

(Palo shoots him. He flies back into the wall.)

PALO: Starship Computer, is there any way to get off this ship during a combat alert?

COMPUTER: *Any properly-maintained Excelsior auxiliary craft can penetrate the shield bubble.*

PALO: Where's the closest one?

SCENE 403-15

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

(Neeva and Dovan at a light jog through the empty hallways.)

NEEVA: Captain, the rec deck is this way.

DOVAN: That's not where we're going. The Bringer doesn't want fresh meat yet.

NEEVA: Where, then?

DOVAN: Jalin Tigan's quarters are on this deck.

NEEVA: But the Bringer doesn't know that.

DOVAN: The Bringer knows exactly where Jalin Tigan is every minute of every day. That's where he's going.

NEEVA: And what do we do when we find him? Transporters can't lock on.

DOVAN: I'll shoot him with your gun, as planned. The Bringer leaves Lorhrok, enters another body — mine —

NEEVA: — and we weaken him enough to send him — you — to the planet.

DOVAN: Leaving me behind. Yeah. That's the hope, anyway.

(As they round the corner, the Bringer rounds another corner way down the corridor.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Hope is a foolish sentiment, Captain.

(Neeva and Dovan stop running.)

DOVAN: Bringer!

LORHROK-BRINGER: Hope is nothing more than the unreasoning belief that I can be finally defeated. In the whole history of the cosmos, it has never been vindicated.

DOVAN: In the whole history of the cosmos, nobody has ever pointed a gun like this at your head.

(Dovan recharges the BIG GUN from the previous scene.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: And yet you, too, are going to die, Alcar Dovan. Poetically, at sunset.

DOVAN: Fortune cookies don't scare me, Bringer. Neeva, circle around and have Security cordon off this section.

NEEVA: Yes, sir.

(She heads off.)

DOVAN: I'll bet the Iconians on that planet below us shared your confidence, Bringer — right up until the moment they were exterminated.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Exterminated? Exterminated. Captain Dovan, even at the height of the war, do you seriously believe the beings who created me could be threatened by a bunch of insects?

DOVAN: Is that how you see us? As insects? Then perhaps you're out of the loop. The Iconians are all dead, and it was us puny mortals who did it.

LORHROK-BRINGER: They're not dead! Exiled! Along with their enemies! In the last days the Iconians were weak because they were ashamed, not afraid. That's when I left.

DOVAN: They got too soft for your taste?

LORHROK-BRINGER: Death does not have "taste". Death has a function. As the Vidiians say: Life is a dream. I am the interpreter.

DOVAN: Nice try. But we both know better.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Are you going to try telling me my purpose, Dovan? You'll be the third wrong guess today.

DOVAN: No, you have no purpose. We try to make one up, because that's what sapient beings do: we look for meanings in everything. But you're a riddle that can't be cracked – because you're not a riddle at all. You're Death. You kill us because you hate us. And you will keep on killing us – rich, poor, good, evil – until the last microjoule of joy has been squeezed out of the universe. How'm I doing?

LORHROK-BRINGER: You forgot your place, Dovan. You forget my power.

(The ship shakes! The computer blares an alert.)

COMPUTER: *WARNING: ship's internal volume exceeds external volume. Severe structural strain.*

DOVAN: You think that scares me? That warning didn't even make sense.

LORHROK-BRINGER: You will send me home or I will destroy your ship.

DOVAN: No, that's not how this works, Bringer. We're not negotiating, and you don't get to challenge me to a game of your choice to save your skin. Computer, distance between me and the Bringer!

COMPUTER: *Eight meters.*

(Dovan begins walking toward the Bringer.)

COMPUTER: *Seven meters. Six.*

(A flash of electricity and power! Dovan is flung back, landing heavily on the floor!)

DOVAN: Aeeagh!

COMPUTER: *Ten meters.*

LORHROK-BRINGER: I don't play games. Send me home, now, or I will destroy your ship.

(The ship rocks wildly again.)

SCENE 403-17**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

COMPUTER: *Warning: hull buckling on Deck Fourteen. Evacuate all personnel.*

(Palo marches down the corridor at a brisk clip.)

NEEVA: I'm sorry, Mister Palo [you can't come through here.]

PALO: I need that turbolift.

(The ship shakes.)

NEEVA: Mister Palo, this entire section is locked down.

PALO: Is there another way to get to the captain's yacht?

NEEVA: Mister Palo, I assure you there's no cause for alarm. Return to your — ahh!

(Palo shoots Neeva with his phaser. Her body falls heavily to the ground.)

PALO: I don't have time for this.

(Palo steps over Neeva's unconscious body. A turbolift door just beyond swishes open to admit him.)

PALO: Deck Thirteen.

(The turbolift starts moving.)

SCENE 403-18

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

(Ship's bulkheads are actually beginning to audibly twist and strain.)

COMPUTER: *Warning: anti-matter containment fields compromised. Backups compromised. Secondary backups compromised. Tertiary backups compromised. Quaternary backups... engaged.*

LORHROK-BRINGER: Your recreation deck? I could vent its atmosphere in an instant. This turbolift running behind me? I would crush it like so much aluminium foil. Make your choice, Captain. Surrender or die. It is no difference to me.

(Dovan hits his commbadge.)

DOVAN: Bridge, this is the captain.

YUBARI: *Bridge here, sir.*

DOVAN: Evacuate the saucer section. Prepare for emergency separation.

YUBARI: *Aye, sir!*

ROL: *Captain, this is Rol. Is something wrong with my gun?*

DOVAN: No, Bev, just me. I can't get close! I may have to fire at range.

ROL: *You'd send the Bringer back to Underheaven! You can't fire, sir! They'd all die!*

DOVAN: So could we, Lieutenant, if you don't make that saucer sep! Dovan out!

LORHROK-BRINGER: Even if they evacuate in time, I will destroy them, Captain. Your destiny lies before you; the false edifice of choice crumbles away. Either shoot me from there and send

me back to where I came from... or die here, with your ship and crew, and I'll return to Underheaven anyway. Embrace despair.

DOVAN: I... I thought we had you beaten. Finally. Just once. Just for Ryse's daughter... but beaten.

LORHROK-BRINGER: Do you know my favorite thing in all the cosmos, Dovan? In all the billions of years I and my cousins have culled your herds?

DOVAN: The retirement benefits.

LORHROK-BRINGER: The look on your face right now. I live for that.

(The door behind the Bringer opens.)

PALO: [Com]puter, prepare captain's yacht for undock — Bringer! Why are you [here?]

LORHROK-BRINGER: Palo, you fool! You're too close!

(The turbolift door closes.)

PALO: Captain, help me! He's right next to me!

(Dovan hefts and recharges the big gun.)

LORHROK-BRINGER: Get away, Palo!

DOVAN: Too late!

(Dovan fires the big gun! It emits a steady beam, like a phaser crossed with a tractor beam. Electricity crackles! Thunder cracks!)

DOVAN: You know what I live for, Bringer? (Pause) The look on your face right now.

PALO: Dovan, no, please!

DOVAN: I'm sorry, Palo. It has to be you.

PALO: Please... I don't want to die. (Pause) Please don't kill me. (Pause) Just let them die.

DOVAN: I'm so sorry.

(The beam completes its work with a sudden flash. Lorchrok and Palo both tumble loudly to the ground.)

(Dovan runs up to Lorchrok.)

DOVAN: Alecz! Alecz, are you okay?

LORHROK: (with a groan) Uhhnn... Alcar?

PALO-BRINGER: Alecz Lorchrok. Underwood's folly.

DOVAN: Bridge, can you get a lock on the Bringer? It's in Palo now.

YUBARI: *Yes, sir. Transporter lock is stable.*

DOVAN: Beam it to the planet.

PALO-BRINGER: I am postponed, Dovan. Never defeated.

DOVAN: Energize.

(The Bringer is beamed away.)

DOVAN: Bridge, load two quantum torpedoes and destroy the Aetherskimmer. Then drop a warning buoy around this planet, lay in a course for Ryse's homeworld, and get us out of here, maximum warp.

YUBARI: With pleasure, sir. Bridge out.

DOVAN: You back with us, Lorchrok?

LORHROK: Neeva. Neeva's hurt. I hurt her! You have to help her!

(Neeva emerges from the turbolift!)

NEEVA: Alecz!

(She runs to him and crouches down.)

LORHROK: Neeva. How...?

NEEVA: Palo's phaser was only set to stun. I was coming after him, but... I see you've taken care of it.

LORHROK: My fault. My fault.

NEEVA: No, Alecz. Never your fault. Do you hear me? Never.

(Pause.)

LORHROK: I'm sorry about our date tonight.

NEEVA: What are you talking about?

LORHROK: In the holodeck. You would have had to confirm our reservation while I was the Bringer.

NEEVA: Are you kidding? Of course I confirmed, and I expect you there at nineteen hundred. I'm not going ringsurfing alone.

DOVAN: Neither of you are going anywhere until Doctor Sharp has cleared you. Report to sickbay.

(Neeva stands.)

NEEVA: Yes, sir!

(She helps Lorhrok to his feet.)

(Pause.)

LORHROK: Captain, I'm... I'm sorry.

DOVAN: Are you listening to your girlfriend? You have nothing to be sorry for. Now scram.

(They walk into the turbolift and are gone.)

DOVAN: No, this one's on me, Lorhrok. (sigh) (Pause) Let's see how Jalin Tigan is doing.
(Pause) Life goes on.

(He walks down the corridor.)

SCENE 403-19: EPILOGUE

LOCATION: ADMIRAL PARKER'S OFFICE - STARBASE 911

(An insistent beeping pulses on Admiral Parker's console. After three pulses, he answers it.)

PARKER: Syracuse. Dionysius reads you loud and clear.

DOVAN: Good to see you again, Admiral Parker.

PARKER: Syracuse... use the codenames. (Pause) I read your report. An interesting case. I wouldn't have believed it, except...

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Except?

PARKER: Well, during the day when the Bringer allegedly possessed your exec, no one on his home planet died. As far as anyone can tell, not a single Trill died anywhere in the galaxy that day. The press is calling it a miracle. I have no idea what we're going to tell them.

DOVAN: Tell them they're right. It's true enough.

PARKER: What if it had kept going, though? If no Trill had ever died again? Could their society survive? Could ours?

DOVAN: It'd be... different.

PARKER: It's a good reminder — and a lucky dodge. Sometimes I forget how much death is a necessary evil.

DOVAN: No evil is necessary, Admiral. That's why it's evil.

PARKER: Bold words, coming from you, Syracuse. But that's not why you called. You have the additional information I requested?

DOVAN: We weren't able to sweep the ruins as thoroughly as we did on Mantua.

PARKER: I understand. The Shroud. What did you get?

DOVAN: Enough.

PARKER: Enough?

DOVAN: Enough to know that we were not the only people to visit that planet in the past quarter-million years. Somebody else went through very recently – a lot of someones, actually. A large team – at least a thousand people – excavated these ruins in the past six months. And, somehow, they got out through the Shroud when they were finished.

PARKER: You've suppressed this information aboard your ship?

DOVAN: As ordered, sir. You want to tell me what it's all about?

PARKER: You're sure they explored the entire ruin? They didn't search through half and then stop abruptly?

DOVAN: No, not as far as we could tell. The search pattern was thorough. But we found no evidence that anything was taken. Strange thing for treasure hunters to do. Does it mean anything?

PARKER: It means they didn't find what they were looking for. (Pause) That'll be all for now, Syracuse. Do keep me informed.

DOVAN: Aye – (Parker ends the transmission abruptly) ...sir.