

Starship Excelsior
“Down the Rabbit Hole”
(Season 1, Episode 4)

Transcribed by Peter Stine

RECAP

SCENE 104-01**LOCATION: A SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.**

(Transporter materialize.)

There is a powerful ringing in Dovan's ears that begins the moment he begins to materialize. At first, we can hear barely any other sound because of it, and it lasts a moderately long time.

DOVAN: (panting, a little groaning, trying not to vomit... then relaxing)

DOVAN: Yubari? (pause)

(There is a groan from the ground beside him.)

YUBARI: (very weakly) (a long groan)

DOVAN: Yubari!

DOVAN: Lieutenant. Are you alright?

YUBARI: I... where... (groan)?

DOVAN: (softly) We're in the Valandrian catacombs under the capital. Do you remember? We're looking for —

YUBARI: (still weak) For the weapon. The source of... of the disease. I... I...
(realizing) I'm going to —

(Yubari vomits)

YUBARI: (grunt)

DOVAN: Easy now. The transporter sickness will pass. Let me help you up. Easy does it.

YUBARI: I'll... be alright. Commander.

DOVAN: (kindly; trying to add levity) I thought you said you didn't *get* transporter sickness.

YUBARI: You didn't give me much of *chance*! You just... beamed us off the bridge! You could have killed us both; what the hell were you *thinking*?

(Pause)

DOVAN: I was thinking I might try to save everyone on the *Excelsior*. I was *thinking* you'd want to come along, and maybe we could work together. You know... and be heroes. (dryly) Strictly on our own time, of course.

(Pause)

YUBARI: (snorting noncommittally) Huh.

DOVAN: Now, then. I can't see a thing. I don't suppose you brought a palm beacon.

YUBARI: (sarcastic) Yeah, sure, I picked one up when we passed the weapons locker on our stroll down to the transporter room.

DOVAN: (rolls his eyes) No need to get snippy. Then we'll have to use our tricorders 'til we can fashion a torch.

(He pulls out his tricorder and opens it up.)

DOVAN: While you're at it, you can get me a scan of this place. I'm going to start up a mapping protocol.

(Yubari pulls out her own tricorder and begins scanning with it, while Dovan hits some buttons on his to get a mapping protocol running.)

YUBARI: You might want to work on figuring out what this place *is* first.

DOVAN: (absent-mindedly) These are the Valandrian ceremonial catacombs. 'Course, no one knows why they're called catacombs, since no one's actually been buried down here in known history. Legend has it that this is a place of terrible fear and power, and that's actually why the local warlords built their capital here. Even though the place scares them so much they haven't officially allowed anyone down here in the last five centuries.

(Stunned silence)

DOVAN: What? So I actually *do* read mission reports. Don't tell anybody; I have a reputation to protect.

YUBARI: (shrugging): Fine. For all the good it —

(Her tricorder beeps an alert.)

YUBARI: What?

(She hits the side of her tricorder.)

YUBARI: Great. Now my tricorder isn't working.

DOVAN: What? What's wrong?

YUBARI: It's giving me the wrong age for this cave wall.

(Dovan waves his tricorder over the same wall.)

YUBARI (continuing): This stone has to be older than life on Valandria. But this... *thing* is telling me it's only...

DOVAN: Eight thousand years old.

DOVAN (continuing): I'm getting the same reading. (reflectively) Eight thousand... That's as old as Valandrian civilization. (pause) Give it a closer look while we get moving. I'm picking up a faint power signature, and I'll bet darseks to doughnuts that it's the source of whatever's making the *Excelsior* crew sick.

(Closing his tricorder, he begins walking. Yubari follows a step behind.)

YUBARI: (reading off her tricorder) Huh.

DOVAN: What?

YUBARI: The tricorder's *not* broken. It's detecting something... fused with the rock, almost. Some sort of... "organic-mechanical compound."

DOVAN: I have no idea what that means.

YUBARI: Same. Just technobabble to me. But, whatever it is, it's fused with the rock. All of it. The entire catacomb, it would appear.

DOVAN: Fused. Like the *Oracle*.

YUBARI: Sir?

DOVAN: When I saw the hull of the *Oracle*, it... it had become *part* of the rock. Impossible. I just assumed it was a trick of the light when I saw it, but later, when Lohrok reported his sensor data... it was true. The *Oracle* had been *merged* with the mountain it had crashed into. And then everything else started happening, and I haven't thought about it since. Still... two impossible rock-fusings on one planet? That can't be a coincidence.

YUBARI: I don't — Wait.

(Her tricorder makes alert sounds.)

YUBARI: (continuing) Something's coming.

DOVAN: *Someone or something?*

YUBARI: Spherical, one meter diameter... and floating. I'm going to say "thing." Get down, behind that rubble.

DOVAN: *Why?*

YUBARI: Because it's bristling with *weapons*; what do you *think*?

DOVAN: Jehosaphat.

(They crouch behind some rubble; Yubari draws her phaser)

(The ROBOT GUARD passes by slowly.)

YUBARI: Alright. I didn't like the looks of that thing. Let's get out of here, and keep your phaser ready.

DOVAN: Agreed.

(They get moving again.)

YUBARI: Sir, I was thinking... does any of this remind you of the old legends? About the Scions of the Stars?

DOVAN: (snorts derisively)

YUBARI: Well, the legends always talk about how the Scions had great power over mind and matter. It would explain the source of the Wasting, and how that bio-stuff in the walls of...

DOVAN: Look, Lieutenant. The Scions are an old Space Boomer legend. Every time Starfleet sets out into a new territory, like the Delta Quadrant, a whole new crop of Scion-hunters pops up. But there's nothing to them. Never has been. And, frankly, I'm surprised a bright young Starfleet officer like yourself would even dignify them with an investigation.

(Pause)

DOVAN: (continuing) Plus, the bioelectric profiles are all wrong. Cartier's study of the Scions—

YUBARI: You've read Cartier?

DOVAN: (defensively) I... I'm from Gault. There's not a whole lot to read there except agricultural journals and crackpot conspiracy theories.

YUBARI: I see.

DOVAN: No, the Scions aren't involved in Valandria. I'm certain of that. But I *am* beginning to suspect that we're dealing with someone older than the Valandrin in all this. Someone older... and nastier.

He glances down at the map on his tricorder.

DOVAN: We're here.

YUBARI: Good; I think I can see light coming in from the next chamber.

DOVAN: (puzzled) I don't know where it's coming from. We're still half a kilometer beneath the city.

YUBARI: Why should I care? It's light, isn't it?

DOVAN: True. (slight pause) I'm going in first. Be ready for anything.

YUBARI: (cocky) I always am.

DOVAN: Three. Two. One.

(He leaps over the threshold, phaser drawn)

DOVAN: Hyugh!

DOVAN: (slow gasp in surprise. And awe.)

YUBARI: Sir?

DOVAN: You'd better come see this.

NARRATOR: Yubari stepped out into the next chamber, and found herself on an overhang, which was overlooking... well, it was hardly fair to say it was overlooking a cave, because there are very few caves in the known galaxy large enough to even compete with this mammoth cavity. Five, maybe six klicks long from where Yubari was standing and easily half that in height, it was more like a cathedral than a cave... though a cathedral to what, she couldn't have guessed. This was to say nothing of the ornamentation. Strewn about the sanctuary between the great, bare walls were vast piles of twisted metal. Twisted metal that, somehow, bore a familiar form.

YUBARI: What...?

DOVAN: (realizing) My God. They're starships.

(Pause)

DOVAN: Yubari, what *exactly* am I looking at?

(Yubari is already scanning.)

YUBARI: Picking up trace amounts of beryllium silicate, tritanium, and degraded aluminum crystalfoam. They're Starfleet, sir. And they're reading as eight thousand years old. Just like the catacombs themselves.

DOVAN: Can you pick up any transponder signals, anything that might identify one of the ships?

(Yubari closes the tricorder.)

YUBARI: I don't have to. Look. On that nacelle.

DOVAN: N...C...V, eight-three-one-two-four. U. S. S....

DOVAN: (groaning inwardly) *Oracle*.

THEME SONG!

NARRATOR: *Today's episode: The Excelsior Returns, Act Five of Five: "Down the Rabbit Hole."*

SCENE 104-02**LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR**

SHARP: Medical Log, Stardate fifty-nine thousand nine hundred fifty-three point eight. After Alcar and his Mystery Officer beamed down to the planet, the autopiloting program he activated guided the Excelsior safely out of the line of fire.

LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR: CORRIDOR

(Dr. Sharp is walking briskly down the corridor)

SHARP: (annoyed) But in my humble opinion, our Acting Captain retreated too late, waiting until we took far too much damage. The Wasting has continued to spread virulently throughout the ship, striking down crewmembers indiscriminately. Thanks to the battle damage, recovery efforts by the few people still on their feet have been hampered by everything from impassable walls of rubble to real threats, like the plasma leak on Deck Twenty-Six. Worse still, the wounds many people took during the battle — whether or not they were already infected — appear to be accelerating the course of the Wasting within their systems.

(Dr. Sharp enters a turbolift.)

SHARP: Deck Eleven.

SHARP: Ship's operations have been paralyzed since I took what would laughingly be called command. I could say that we've been decimated, but it would be more accurate to say that only about one-tenth of the crew is left. Maybe more... maybe less. Every Trill is down, and every human — with the strange exception of Simon Westlake — followed a short time later. I believe that I've only been spared thanks to a few ounces of Andorian blood on my zhavey's side. We've had to start converting new areas to store everyone who's fallen into a coma — ship's morgue, bioscience labs, anything with a stasis field. And still we don't have enough space. We're falling apart faster than we can get the patients to treatment facilities.

(The turbolift reaches its destination, and Sharp steps out, walking down the corridor.)

SHARP: The first dozen people infected with the Wasting have died, and a lot more are on the brink. I've given up trying to find an immediate cure. As long as we're near the source, trapped in this backwater star system with this... voodoo telepathic field around us, the most I can hope is to discover something that will slow the infection, stabilize the most sick, and pray that Alcar stops whatever's causing it on the planet. I've just completed the first promising attempt at a stopgap treatment: a neurological suppressant based on tricordrazine, and, in my professional opinion, a stroke of genius. Unfortunately, we don't have time to test it on anything more than a computer simulation. Our subject is Ship's Counsellor Samwazlau Asii, a Betazoid. Her body is beginning to shut down, and this is her last chance. Clinical trial by fire. I'm on my way to sickbay, wondering: am I doing the right thing by risking Sam's life on my hunch? End log.

(Sharp enters a very busy sickbay.)

SHARP: Why isn't the patient on the table yet? Come on, people, let's *move!*

(A couple of people get on that)

SHARP: Activate sterilization-alpha and raise biocontainment shields.

(A forcefield snaps into place around the bed.)

SHARP: Nurse! Apply the first norep injection!

(Rojan injects Asii with a hypospray as she is placed on the table. The heart monitor starts.)

ROJAN: Applying injection.

SHARP: Exo-scalpel.

ROJAN: Exo-scalpel.

(Sharp uses the device to peel away Asii's scalp.)

SHARP: Initiate test pulses into the autonomic nervous system.

SHARP: And the rest of you, get back to what you're doing! You're in the way!

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #2: Yes, ma'am!

ROJAN: Autonomic nervous response is good. All bioreadings normal, Doctor.

SHARP: Normal? Or within expected safety margins? (pause) Thought so. (tensely)
Let's do it. Seven cc's tricordrazone melacarbonate compound.

(Rojan clicks some of the buttons at the head of the hypospray.)

ROJAN: Ready.

SHARP: Apply.

(Rojan injects Asii.)

SHARP: Brawley! Get the neuralytic modulator energized! I don't want her going into shock when her paracortex shuts down!

BRAWLEY: Yes, Doctor!

ROJAN: Signs of adrenal synchronomia are fading. Norepinephrine levels falling. Good. This is going well.

SHARP: Apply the second injection.

(Rojan does so.)

ROJAN: Cerebral cortex activity leveling off.

SHARP: Good. What's the efferent count?

ROJAN: Thirty-one over sixty.

SHARP: Is that in Q or Z?

ROJAN: (off-balance) I'm... sorry. Q.

SHARP: Not as good as I hoped, but it should be enough. Neuralytic modulator. Set to forty-six microvolts.

ROJAN: Modulator locked in.

SHARP: Do it.

(There's an electric pulse noise. Asii's body twitches.)

SHARP: Looks good. Last injection of norepinephrine?

(An alarm sound)

SHARP: What--?

(More alarms interrupt her.)

ROJAN: Fluctuations in the isocortex!

SHARP: Sixty cc's inoprovaline!

(Rojan reloads the proper hypospray.)

ROJAN: Efferent count is skyrocketing!

SHARP: How? Are we *feeding* this thing?

ROJAN: She's going into synaptic shock.

SHARP: No! Neuralytic modulator! Seventy microvolts!

(Another electric pulse. Asii's body doesn't move.)

(Heart rate monitor flatlines.)

ROJAN: Organ death imminent!

SHARP: Ten cc's leporazine!

ROJAN: It's too late! Her body can't absorb that much leporazine!

SHARP: Then I need a cortical stimulator.

(Rojan hands her the device, which Sharp places on Asii's forehead.)

SHARP: Sixty percent! Now!

(Cortical stimulator fires. No response)

SHARP: Again!

(The cortical stimulators fire again. Again, no response.)

ROJAN: No response in the isocortex. Respiration failing.

SHARP: Come on, Sam. (to Rojan) One more try!

(The cortical stimulators fire again. No response.)

(Everything flatlines.)

ROJAN: She's gone, Doctor.

(Pause)

SHARP: Make a note in the log. Death occurred at... eighteen thirty-one hours.

ROJAN: You did everything you could, Doctor. Her isocortex just wasn't strong enough—

SHARP: Don't. Sam Asii is dead, and I killed her. I didn't have a choice, but that doesn't make it any easier. Lower the containment field.

(The containment field drops. Sharp and Rojan walk away from the table.)

SHARP: You're right, though. The Wasting started destabilizing her neocortex the moment we administered the drug. There was no way she could absorb that much cordrazine under those conditions.

ROJAN: Otherwise, it almost worked.

SHARP: Well... Maybe so. But I can't predict how the Wasting will react to our treatments. And I can't afford to keep taking shots in the dark.

ROJAN: You might just have to take your best guess. We don't have any patients who've fought off the infection. There's no baseline.

SHARP: That's true. At least, I think it is.

(She begins walking.)

ROJAN: What? Where are you--?

SHARP: I just got a hunch. Probably nothing, but I've... (sadly) got nothing else right now. Don't forget: The moment those satellites go down, go to full impulse and get the ship to Valandria as fast as you can.

ROJAN: Why? Where will you be?

SHARP: Engineering.

(Sharp exits Sickbay.)

SCENE 104-03**LOCATION: STARSHIP GRAVEYARD**

(Dovan and Yubari are climbing down a rockface.)

DOVAN: So, let me get this straight. That ship over there is the back half of the U.S.S. *Oracle*.

YUBARI: Uh-huh.

DOVAN: The *Oracle* won't be built for another twenty-five years. But it's going to get attacked, fall through time, and crash.six hundred years ago.

YUBARI: Right.

DOVAN: And that's where we found the front half, stuck in that mountain for just about six centuries. But here's the *other* half of the ship, and it's reading as. . . how old, again?

YUBARI: Eight thousand years.

DOVAN: Right. (Pause) How the heck does that work?

YUBARI: (irritated, cheeky) Sir, do you always talk this much?

DOVAN: Only when I have an audience, Lieutenant. Ah, the ground. Hyugh!

(Dovan jumps to the ground, landing on his feet. Yubari follows suit.)

YUBARI: Hyugh!

DOVAN: Let's head for the *Oracle* wreck first. Then we can continue on to the power source I detected.

YUBARI: Sir.

DOVAN: Oh, no. (pause) What ship were they from?

YUBARI: From the splash pattern, I'd say these bodies are from the one over there, sir. The... uh...

DOVAN: The *Pegasus*. That's Admiral Bremer's ship. If he was at this battle, and these men still died... then there really was nothing that could have saved them. Mike Bremer knows better than to fight to the death if there's any other choice. (pause) Damn. This battle really *did* go badly, didn't it? (beat) Tag as many of the bodies for transport as you can. Starfleet officers deserve better than to rot beneath some primitive world for all eternity. No matter what time period they're from. (pause) Let's go.

(He starts walking.)

YUBARI: Actually, sir, I was only wondering how so many bodies could be so well preserved if they've been down here for eight thousand years.

(Dovan looks at his tricorder.)

DOVAN: Better question: why aren't there any bodies around the *Oracle*?

YUBARI: I don't see how that's a better question.

DOVAN: (ignoring her) There were no bodies with the saucer section when Captain Cortez's team found it, so we assumed that all the personnel were with the stardrive... wherever it had gone. But here we are, looking right at the stardrive hull of the *Oracle*, and it seems to be the only ship in the entire vicinity *without* any bodies around it.

YUBARI: (edgy) I don't have an answer for you.

DOVAN: (casually, but also with edge) That's okay; unless it involves invading a small planet, you intelligence types rarely do.

(He closes his tricorder.)

DOVAN: *Oracle* hull's still about a half-a-kilometer away. We can speculate while we walk.

YUBARI: No, I... don't think so.

DOVAN: (annoyed) *Excuse me, Lieu--?*

YUBARI: (interrupting) Commander, just *look!*

(Three of the ROBOT GUARDS are approaching, at higher speeds than last time.)

NARRATOR: *Yubari was pointing at three black spheres, each about a meter in diameter, floating ominously above the ground. Although they were perfectly spherical, Dovan knew that they were looking directly at the two humanoid intruders. He knew this because they were moving straight towards the Away Team. And quickly.*

DOVAN: I especially don't like the looks of that spinning appendage attached to the one in the middle. Looks like a bone saw. (pause) I hate bone saws.

YUBARI: I can imagine why, sir.

DOVAN: I don't suppose there's any chance they haven't seen us yet?

YUBARI: I seriously doubt it.

DOVAN: Phasers?

(She draws her sidearm.)

YUBARI: At the ready.

(Dovan draws his phaser.)

DOVAN: Fire.

(Both fire. The shots are absorbed by an energy shield around the probe.)

YUBARI: No effect.

DOVAN: Increase power setting to sixteen.

(They both increase the power settings on their phasers.)

DOVAN: Fire.

(They fire again.)

DOVAN: No effect.

YUBARI: Well, that was pointless.

DOVAN: (seriously) Lieutenant. Run.

YUBARI: (sarcastically) Oh, very clever plan, sir!

(Almost as one, they break into a run away from the robots.)

(The robots follow them.)

(There is a burst of Disruptor energy; it hits some pile of metal debris, which tumbles.)

DOVAN: Yubari!

YUBARI: I'm fine, sir! Clean miss! Where did they get energy weapons?

DOVAN: One more question we can ask later! Come on; this way!

(He pauses to take a shot with his phaser while Yubari catches up. He follows behind her as the robots fire several more shots at them.)

YUBARI: We can't keep this up forever!

(Dovan fires another covering shot.)

DOVAN: You're right. We can't.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Get behind that wreckage.

(He adjusts the power level on his phaser.)

YUBARI: Why? What are you doing?

(The phaser whines in overload)

DOVAN: Turning my phaser... (he hurls it away and dives for cover) ...into a grenade!

(There is a large, energetic explosion, which is followed shortly by two more explosions.)

DOVAN: That got' em.

YUBARI: I only heard two explosions.

DOVAN: Really? (pause) Then we'd better get moving.

YUBARI: Shouldn't we check to make sure we destroyed all three?

DOVAN: No, we shouldn't. If it *is* still alive, we have to get away from here. There's no time to waste.

YUBARI: Fine. Then let's get moving.

(She starts off at a brisk walk. Dovan follows.)

SCENE 104-04**LOCATION: USS ORACLE: SICKBAY**

NARRATOR: *Lieutenants Rol and Lorhrok had been yanked twenty years into the future and cast aboard the most powerful prototype warship in Starfleet history — a ship which, incidentally, they both knew to be doomed. However, the period immediately following this improbable and potentially galaxy-transforming accident proved to be... something of an anti-climax.*

(Rol is lying on a biobed, staring at the ceiling, bored. Four of Seven walks over to the bed.)

FOUR OF SEVEN: You are now under observation. Your biological distinctiveness will be added to our... records.

ROL: (dryly) Thanks, buddy. I presume you're the one doing the observation?

(Silence.)

ROL: So... you're a Borg.

(Silence.)

ROL: What's that like?

(Silence.)

ROL: I mean, is there still a 'you' who takes orders from the hive mind? Or am I just speaking to the whole Collective when I talk to this drone?

(Silence.)

ROL: Not to mention the voices! Do you hear *everyone*, or just the Queen? And does the Queen have her own voice, or is she just a constructed intelligence operating as a simulacrum for the hive mind?

(A longer silence.)

ROL: (sighs) Okay, fine. You win, Monty. No conversation for me.

FOUR OF SEVEN: This drone's designation is Four of Seven. Further irrelevant inquiries will be disregarded.

ROL: Fine, then. I was just trying to strike up a —

FOUR OF SEVEN: You were attempting to extract tactical information from the Collective that would be useful to your intelligence services in the late twenty-fourth century. You are Alex Rol, serial number DH-dash-nine-nine-seven-dash-one-one-six, historical assignment: Starfleet Special Operations Division, intelligence and infiltration specialist, U.S.S. *Excelsior*. (pause) (vaguely conciliatory yet vaguely smug) Deceit is part of your distinctiveness.

(Surprised pause)

(Lorhrok walks up.)

ROL: It was a fair cop. But you can't blame a guy for —

LORHROK: I hate to interrupt, but I could use a hand with the repairs on the *Oracle* A.I.'s holomatrix.

ROL: Not at all, Lieutenant. Just tell me what you need from me.

LORHROK: (slightly apologetic) Actually... nothing. Frankly, trying to fix twenty-fifth century technology is hard even for me, and I've been doing this all my life. (muttering) Doesn't help that they won't let me use any tools manufactured in the last

thirty years, but... Anyhow, I was hoping Four of Seven here might be of some help to me.

FOUR OF SEVEN: The Collective... (pause) Concur. New designation is One of Two, tasked to hologram repair.

LORHROK: (somewhat uncomfortable all of a sudden) Perfect. Let's... get to it, then.

ROL: Lieutenant!

(Lorhrok stops, turns around.)

ROL: How's your work going?

(Pause)

LORHROK: Well... we've got him back up to fourteen percent, and I *think* we're speeding his repair algorithms.

ROL: But you're not sure.

LORHROK: No. Every time I ask him a question, it's the same thing:

LORHROK and ROL: (simultaneous) (imitating the Oracle) That information is not available. Database corruption is extensive.

LORHROK: ... yeah, that's the one. The one thing I'm sure of is that the faster we get the A.I. back up to a hundred percent, the faster we get sent home.

ROL: And that's a... good thing?

LORHROK: I'm sorry? I don't follow.

(Surprised pause)

ROL: Never mind. Good luck, Alecz.

LORHROK: Thanks. You too.

(Lorhrok heads away to the doctor's office. One of Two follows him.)

ROL: (muttering) Good luck doing *what* exactly? Napping?

(Lieutenant Junior Grade HERTZLER comes through the sickbay doors.)

HERTZLER: (shouting across the quiet room) Hey, Doc! Reporting as ordered for my radiation workup!

SHARP: (Calling back) *Take a biobed, Lieutenant! I'll be with you in a second!*

HERTZLER: Lieutenant.

ROL: Lieutenant.

(Pause)

HERTZLER: I'm sorry, I'm not good with names. Have we met before?

ROL: Well, I'm new.

HERTZLER: Oh, I get it. (pause) So, what're you in for? Standard medical workup?

ROL: Me? No. Actually, Doctor Sharp is holding me prisoner.

HERTZLER: Heh. That's Doctor Sharp for you. You heard about the time she got sick of the captain ignoring her rest orders, and so she put him in an actual restraining field? *During a battle?*

ROL: Ha! No I haven't. But I wouldn't put it past her!

HERTZLER: No kidding! One thing about Commander Sharp: she's got guts.

(Short pause.)

ROL: So... where you from?

HERTZLER: Me? (sadly) I... it was... It was one of the worlds in the Raeyan sector. My... whole family was out there during the attack.

ROL: (sympathetic) I'm sorry.

HERTZLER: (putting on a brave face) Don't be. That's one of the reasons I'm here. No one can do what they did to Raeya and not pay for it. And the Myriad is *going* to pay for it.

(A short but awkward silence.)

ROL: So, um... what're you in Sickbay for?

HERTZLER: Oh, you know. Standard radiation treatment. I was down working on the transphasic chroniton torpedoes. Trying to increase their yield a little bit more before we find one of their Blobs.

ROL: Wait. You need radiation treatments to work near that thing?

HERTZLER: Well... really only if you're getting down into the nitty-gritty with it. But it's worth it. We've got it up now so that just four of these guys can destroy a class-six planet. And I mean *pulverize* it. Nothing left but dust.

ROL: Whoa. That's... that's pretty impressive. I hope it comes in handy for us during the battle. (Pause) Lieutenant, have you ever... been in combat... with the Myriad?

(A long pause.)

HERTZLER: No. But I had a brother who was. Why? Pre-battle jitters?

ROL: Something like that.

HERTZLER: Don't worry. The transchroniton torpedo is going to be more than enough to win this one. Hell, we might even win the war. (darkly) Well, this one, at least.

ROL: Is there anything you can tell me about the Myriad? Something I... didn't hear in the standard briefing, maybe?

HERTZLER: Hm. (pause) Well, you know what they say about how their ships are really just four-dimensional rotational matrices, so that they can change size and dimension at will? Standard understanding of the Myriad blob-ships, right? The Borg have been telling us that's how they work for *years*.

ROL: ...Of course.

HERTZLER: Yeah, well, it isn't true. Well, at least, we in Engineering don't think it is. Not completely true, at any rate. The outsides of the ships, yes: they're just... big blobs. They can change from a few meters long to the size of a small moon just like *that* (he snaps fingers on both his hands noisily). They use that to make themselves big, mold themselves around a ship, telepathically attack its crew, and then eat the hull. Everyone knows that. (excitedly) But we out here out here on the front line are starting to think there's more to it than that. We suspect that there's also an *interior* to these ships, and what's more, we think they're *fixed* interiors. They exist in three-dimensions, and so, even though they're rotating through time and relative dimensions in space along with the exterior hull, they can't change shape or size.

ROL: And... for the poor non-Engineer in this room... what difference does that make?

HERTZLER: Well, for one, it means that, most of the time, the Blobs are bigger on the inside than the outside, which is... pretty extraordinary. More importantly, it means

that, when they die, the outer skin dries onto the internal structure, and chemically bonds with all the matter it comes into contact with.

ROL: Well, that's... very... amazing. (muttering to himself) And boring.

HERTZLER: You bet it's amazing. If we're right, it finally explains why the one that crashed on New Victoria went straight through a kilometer of rock and turned into a whole new network of caves. It was just dimensionally rebonding. I suppose that makes the cavern where they found all the starships that were eaten some kind of... enormous stomach.

ROL: Wait... what did you say?

HERTZLER: You know, the New Victoria specimen.

ROL: Yes, but... Lieutenant, if you're right, would it be possible that a starship in close contact with a Blob, that got hit and crashed at the right moment, *could* end up passing through solid rock during the crash?

HERTZLER: Well... maybe. If it were hit by a *huge* explosive force, like... something on the order of a transphasic chroniton torpedo or two. But the odds are a billion to one against. (pause) This *is* a hypothetical question, isn't it?

ROL: For today, yes.

HERTZLER: Then... maybe. Given the right circumstances, yes, you could see a Federation ship stuck halfway into a mountain someday. Only under the right circumstances, through.

ROL: Thanks. That's all I wanted to know. (pause) (quietly) So... what do you think of this alliance with the Borg?

HERTZLER : (snorts derisively) (quietly) / think the Borg know their thirteenth Rule: a deal is a deal is a deal... until a better one comes along. And if we manage to win this war... well, deal's off.

ROL: Heh. You got that right. Where'd you learn the Rules of Acquisition, though? You're human, aren't you?

HERTZLER: Wow. You *are* new. Up here on the front line, we quote the Rules quite a bit. You know, as a memorial. (sigh) What I wouldn't give today to see another Ferengi. I used to think they were just trolls, and the only thing I gave them was contempt. They were greedy, selfish, uncaring... *trolls*. And, you know what? I was *right*. (growing wistful) But, still... when they were gone... you suddenly realized how reassuring it was to have the Ferengi around. I mean, you can't seriously believe the galaxy is coming to an end when you're still dealing with people whose sole concern in the universe is selling you a bulk order of tullaberry wine. You know what I mean?

(Silence.)

ROL: Umm... what happened to the Ferengi?

HERTZLER: (Genuinely thrown by this question.) Are you kidding?

SHARP: Hello, Lieutenant. I hope you weren't speaking too much to our guest?

ROL: (very quietly, mostly mouthing) No!

HERTZLER: 'Course not, Doc. Wouldn't want to disturb his rest.

SHARP: Hm. Well, your radiation readings all check out. Let me take you back to the lab where I can take a closer look at you.

HERTZLER: Whatever you say, Commander.

(Sharp wanders off. Hertzler stands up.)

HERTZLER: Nice getting to know you, Mister . . .

ROL: Rol. Alex Rol. And the pleasure was all mine.

(Hertzler leaves. Rol, too stands up, and begins to cross sickbay towards the doctor's office, where Lorhrok and Monty are working.)

ROL: Memo to self: easier to get information out of Starfleet than the Borg.

ORACLE: . . .formation is not available. Database corruption —

LORHROK: Computer, deactivate A.I. voice circuits.

(The computer beeps in agreement. The Oracle ceases speaking.)

ROL: Lorhrok.

LORHROK: (surprised) Spast! Shouldn't come up behind me like that, Lieutenant.

ROL: Sorry, Lieutenant. Can I have a word?

LORHROK: Sure.

ROL: Away from the Borg.

LORHROK: Oh. Over there, then.

(They head back to the main sickbay.)

LORHROK: What seems to be the trouble?

ROL: No trouble, Lieutenant. I was wondering how much you'd learned.

LORHROK: Learned?

ROL: About our captors.

LORHROK: *Captors?*

ROL: ...yes. The people who won't let us leave sickbay?

LORHROK: They're... just doing their jobs, Lieutenant. They have a directive about temporal interference. So do we.

(A tense pause.)

LORHROK: Which, I take it, you've broken.

ROL: (surprised; mildly accusatory) You're saying you didn't?

LORHROK: I wasn't planning for my first assignment as Chief Engineer to end in a court-martial, no.

ROL: You're saying you've had access to the computer banks of a starship from the future, with *experience* fighting telepathic weapons, and you didn't even look for a cure for the Wasting?

LORHROK: Experience fighting telepaths?

ROL: Telepathic *weapons*. There's an engineer who was just in here. We had... a few words. About the future.

LORHROK: So you lied to him.

ROL: Actually, no. I'm not that good a liar. It's amazing how much people will assume about you if you just leave it to *them* to fill in the blanks.

LORHROK: Under most circumstances, "the person I'm talking to is not a time traveller" is a safe assumption.

ROL: The point is, I learned something that could help us.

LORHROK: The point is, you're trying to change the timeline using knowledge from the future.

ROL: You know what happens to this ship. It ends up crashed inside of a mountain on Valandria, and everyone dies. How are we supposed to help these people if we don't know more about how that happened?

LORHROK: (sarcastic) Funny. I was getting the impression that you were only learning things that might help *us*. So you were really just being altruistic?

ROL: All these people are going to die, Lieutenant. Are you going to let them?

LORHROK: Lieutenant Rol, the Temporal Prime Directive isn't just there to keep us from destroying our history by accident, from creating a galaxy where the Romulans have wiped out the Federation or Starfleet is at war with the Klingons all because some time meddler didn't plan his changes well enough. Those are horrifying possible futures, yes, and, yes, the laws against changing history are absolute partly in order to protect ourselves. But it's more than that. It's not your *place* to play God, whether you're genetically engineering insane tyrants or terraforming the surface of a world in six minutes or changing the timeline to save peoples' lives. The Temporal Prime Directive protects not just ourselves and our way of life, but a history, past and future, that is bigger than any of us.

ROL: So your answer is yes. You *are* going to let them die.

LORHROK: I'm...

ROL: Don't bother, Mr. Lorhrok. You've made your position quite clear.

LORHROK: It's not my place to *make* these decisions!

ROL: So instead you're letting a piece of paper with some words on it make your decisions for you. *Very brave, Lieutenant.*

LORHROK: (starts out angry, calms quickly) I... I see your point, Mr. Rol. But I won't alter the future *or* the past. Not even to save lives.

ROL: Not even a lot of lives?

LORHROK: No. There's a point when you're being flexible with the rules because you're out on your own on the frontier, and then there's a point where it's just rationalization.

(Pause)

ROL: Fine. But let's at least save the people on the *Oracle*.

LORHROK: I thought I'd made it quite clear that—

ROL: You won't change the timeline. Fine. (pause) How about we... reinterpret it?

(A pause.)

LORHROK: I'm listening.

SCENE 104-05

LOCATION: U.S.S. EXCELSIOR: ENGINEERING

(Consoles are sparking, the warp core is reacting weakly, and Simon Westlake is trying to make repairs while Dr. Sharp scans him.)

WESTLAKE: (annoyed) Will you just *stop* waving that thing around my head? I'm *trying* to put some of this ship back together before the shooting starts again!

SHARP: (soothingly, but not really paying attention to him) Isn't going to be anymore shooting, Simon.

(He crosses over to a different console and keeps working. Sharp follows closely.)

WESTLAKE: Well, I always say, it's better to be ready to fight and not have to, than *not* be ready to fight and get blown up.

SHARP: (still not really paying attention) I understand, Simon. But right now this is more important.

WESTLAKE: (indignant) Will you *stop* talking to me like you don't expect me to listen to what you're saying? I'm perfectly capable of having a civilized conversation with you, Doctor!

(She snaps her tricorder shut.)

SHARP: See, that's just the thing, Simon. You're *not*. At least, you're not supposed to be.

WESTLAKE: Just what does *that* mean?

SHARP: I'll be blunt: you suffer from Elarin's Syndrome. You always have. That's a degenerative neurological condition that is eventually going to kill you, and in the meantime makes it impossible for you to hold a normal conversation with anyone

around you. You're only working in Engineering because Alecz thought it'd be nice to let you have some fun before we took you back home to your father, who's worried about you. Alecz thought he could keep an eye on you during what was going to be a very boring mission.

SHARP: Of course, that didn't work out. Then the Wasting hits. Takes out every single full human on the ship, save one: you.

WESTLAKE: What do you mean?

SHARP: What do you think? Didn't you notice that your fellow surviving engineers are all Andorians, Caitians, and Trigati?

WESTLAKE: (getting nervous) No... I didn't.

SHARP: It's been nearly six hours since this infection began. More than eighty-five percent of the ship is unconscious. And, other than you, Simon, the last full human collapsed at his station over five hours ago. I want to know why.

(Pause.)

WESTLAKE: Maybe it's my... sunny disposition?

SHARP: (softening) Could be. But in case it's something else, I'm taking you down to sickbay. Maybe the laws of medicine can explain what the laws of probability can't. And, if we're very lucky, maybe we'll have a treatment before anyone else dies.

(Silence.)

WESTLAKE: I hope you're right, Doctor. (wryly) I'll come peacefully.

SHARP: (smiling) Good.

SCENE 104-06**LOCATION: STARSHIP GRAVEYARD**

(Dovan and Yubari are walking side-by-side. Dovan is studying his tricorder.)

YUBARI: (asking strictly for information; not complaining) How much longer?

DOVAN: Another kilometer and we'll be at the entrance to the tunnel that leads down to the bottom of this cave system. After that, I don't know.

(He snaps the tricorder shut.)

DOVAN: Well, then. Now might be a good time for you to explain it all to me, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: (annoyed) Explain what?

DOVAN: Your assignment on the *Excelsior*. Why it is you weren't listed on the manifest. What your *real* mission is. You promised me an explanation earlier.

YUBARI: I... was on a special assignment for Captain Cortez.

DOVAN: Uh-huh. Intelligence Division?

(Silence)

DOVAN: Of course. You wouldn't be able to tell me. I don't suppose your mission uncovered anything on Valandria that might come in handy right now?

YUBARI: My mission didn't involve Valandria.

DOVAN: So there *was* a mission.

YUBARI: I — Damn it. (exhales) Yes. I was —

(There is a loud rumble.)

DOVAN: What the — ?

NARRATOR: When they heard the sudden rumbling and creaking noises, the two Starfleet officers looked behind themselves. Then they looked up. They were going around another destroyed starship, and, at the moment, they were passing by an old, upended warp nacelle that towered above them, a quarter-mile high. The darkened nacelle cap, which once spun with the energy of a dozen suns, today was unceremoniously buried in the rock many meters deep. And so the nacelle stood on its own. At least, it had stood on its own. Lieutenant Commander Dovan couldn't help but notice that it was currently — and quite definitely — toppling in the Away Team's general direction.

DOVAN: Down!

YUBARI: Already am!

(The nacelle slams into the ground.)

DOVAN: Are you alright, Lieutenant?

(pause)

DOVAN: Yubari?

YUBARI: (gravely concerned) We need to keep moving.

(She draws her phaser and gets moving... very speedily. Dovan runs to catch up with her.)

DOVAN: Yubari —

(Disrupter fire.)

YUBARI: Down!

DOVAN: Already— (He trails off)

(The distinctive pulsing whine of the one surviving robot guard.)

DOVAN: It found us.

YUBARI: (dry) I thought that “stating the obvious” was only taught in the Counseling School.

DOVAN: Well, back to running, then.

YUBARI: No. Not back to running.

DOVAN: (curious) Are you questioning me?

YUBARI: That nacelle. It was a very convenient cave-in. It sealed our only escape route.

DOVAN: You mean... that thing has us cornered.

YUBARI: Phasers.

DOVAN: I'm fresh out.

YUBARI: Then get behind me, Commander.

(Yubari and the robot exchange fire at intervals.)

YUBARI: Take that, you robot... thingamabob!

(They back into the wall with a clang.)

YUBARI: (frustrated) I can't seem to *hurt* it!

DOVAN: Yeah, well... we just backed into that corner you mentioned.

(The robot's blade starts spinning.)

DOVAN: Oh, and there's the bone saw again.

YUBARI: Any more clever ideas, sir?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I was thinking last words.

YUBARI: Don't know the meaning of the phrase. (pause) We could rush it. One of us might get past.

DOVAN: That was my second idea. Count of four?

DOVAN: One —

BETRA-NA: (jumping down from above them) YAH!

(Beta-Na buries her sword in the robot, killing it.)

(She wrenches her sword out of the wrecked, sputtering hulk.)

BETRA-NA: *That* is why you should always carry a sword.

YUBARI: Premier Beta-Na.

DOVAN: I'm... happy to see you, Premier. Thank you. We thought you were dead.

BETRA-NA: Dead? No. But *you* would have been had I not been around to rescue you.

DOVAN: We owe you a . . . debt of gratitude.

BETRA-NA: No. Consider it repayment, in part, for what befell Rachel Cortez under my protection.

DOVAN: Even though I'm just a male?

BETRA-NA: Come. Your objective and mine may be more closely tied than we have guessed.

Betra-Na start walking. Dovan and Yubari follow a step behind.)

YUBARI: (to Dovan) Stay alert.

DOVAN: And here I was about to say the same thing to you. You did well there, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: Thank you. Sir.

BETRA-NA: You brought a woman with you, Dovan. I am pleased that you saw the wisdom in my advice.

DOVAN: Oh, yes. Your words were at . . . the forefront of my mind. You're going . . . where, exactly?

BETRA-NA: Some months ago, I placed a control platform for the orbital weapons down here, in the heart of the catacombs. No other living person knows of its existence. And when I get access to it, with Sorid-Gee still looking for me on the surface . . .

DOVAN: You'll win the war.

BETRA-NA: Within hours. Minutes, even.

DOVAN: This platform wouldn't happen to be in the same room as the epicenter of all the telepathic activity we've picked up, would it?

BETRA-NA: We cannot be certain until we get there, Dovan. But I am beginning to expect that it will be.

DOVAN: Premier . . . these catacombs. They've been here for a long time, haven't they?

BETRA-NA: Eight thousand years, Dovan. That *is* a long time where you come from, is it not?

DOVAN: Oh, definitely. It's just . . . these ships look a lot like the *Excelsior*. And the *Oracle*, for that matter.

BETRA-NA: Yes, they do. It is one reason we have been so cautious about your Fed'ration. The Oracle has been good to us, yes. But these relics have been with us for a much longer time than that. And they bring with them a much darker history.

DOVAN: How do you mean . . . darker? They've been down here for millennia, yes, but your people are too scared to come near this place.

BETRA-NA: (sharply) And why do you think that is, Dovan? Because there is something to be afraid of down here! Did you know that the Valandrin were once a peaceful people? Eight thousand years ago, we called ourselves farmers and nomads. It is said that, not only did we abstain from the flesh of our enemies, but we did not partake of any meat at all. In many ways, we were weak. But we were also without fear. And then came the Gods.

DOVAN: (dubious) The . . . Gods?

BETRA-NA: Do not take that tone about the Gods, Dovan. They are listening. Even now, They are speaking to me. You would do well not to offend Them, for They do not forgive.

DOVAN: I... (avoids answering) And the Gods built these caves?

BETRA-NA: No, Dovan. The Gods *lived* in the caves when the caves flew through the sky.

DOVAN: The sky?

BETRA-NA: Yes. Our legends say it looked like a great puddle in the sky — unable to hold one shape or size as it crashed towards the most fertile fields. And when it did hit, it hit with such force that it did not stay on the ground, nor even make a hole — it simply passed through the bedrock, and did not stop for a long way. When it did, here it was — all around us. The Catacombs. The Great Graveyard in which we walk even now. After that, the Gods spoke.

DOVAN: What did they say?

BETRA-NA: Many things, but mainly of war and conquest and the defeat of one's enemies. They spoke all across the world — inside the very minds of our ancestors.

DOVAN: And you gave up your peaceful culture to follow the ways of your gods.

BETRA-NA: No. Many would not listen. And so the Gods prepared a Penance for us. They searched all our world and found our greatest warrior — the leader who best modeled the qualities they sought. Her name was Mara, mother of all. And then the Gods sent the Wasting upon us, and every Valandrian who did not belong to Mara or her House fell ill and died. The Gods made her Queen of All Valandrin, and then went to sleep. They promised that on the day of their return, there would be another Reckoning. Our Gods made us warriors: what we are, what we love to be. But we do not love our Gods.

DOVAN: I understand. Then... when we appeared here, and your leaders recognized our ship design from these caves, you thought we were the Gods, returning from our long slumber to wreak destruction on your planet.

BETRA-NA: Sorid-Gee believed that. And then, when you brought the Wasting to Astrin-Sa and to the people... there are still many moments that / believe that.

DOVAN: Frankly, you almost have *me* believing it.

YUBARI: Well, not me. Could you hurry up? We still don't know if there are more of those robots around.

DOVAN: Fine, fine. We'll pick up the pace, Yubari.

(They hasten a little more.)

SCENE 104-07**LOCATION: U.S.S. ORACLE: CORRIDOR (OUTSIDE SICKBAY)**

(Suddenly, the door opens, and Rol pokes his head out.)

ROL: Oh, thank God; security's posted right outside the sickbay door. Come quickly! Doctor Sharp's collapsed!

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #4: Go for help. I'll see what's happened.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #5: Aye, sir!

(The first guard follows Rol in while the other runs off for the lift. The sickbay doors close behind.)

LOCATION: U.S.S. ORACLE: SICKBAY

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #4: Alright. Where's Doctor--?

(Pause.)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #4: (confused/suspicious) What's Monty doing on the ground?

FOUR OF SEVEN: (as contemptuously as the Borg can manage) It's a trap, Ensignnnhhh..... (fades into unconsciousness)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #4: I demand to know--!

LORHROK (interrupting): Sorry. Too late.

(There is a hiss of a hypospray.)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #4: Unnhhhh...

(He collapses.)

ROL: Ah, Starfleet Security Division . . . gullible in any time period.

LORHROK: That's all of them. Corridor clear?

ROL: Yes, but not for long. The other guard was going to get aid.

LORHROK: Then let's get moving.

(They quickly exit sickbay together.)

ROL: Jefferies Tube access is at the end of the corridor.

LORHROK: Actually, it's right here.

(He pulls off a section of wall plating.)

ROL: Oh. I bow to your engineering wisdom.

LORHROK: Just get in the tube, Rol.

ROL: Yes, *sir*.

LOCATION: U.S.S. ORACLE: JEFFERIES TUBE

(They both climb in the tube. Rol pulls the entrance closed.)

LORHROK: Okay. Let's go over this again.

ROL: First, I'd like to point out that the *Oracle* A.I. is now . . . ninety-four percent recompiled. That only gives us about . . . six minutes before he finishes repairing himself and sends us back to our own time.

LORHROK: Six minutes?

ROL: Give or take. We have to get going.

LORHROK: Agreed.

LOCATION: U.S.S. ORACLE: SICKBAY

(The door opens. Several pairs of feet rush in.)

HERTZLER: (confused) Doctor? (concerned) Doctor Sharp! Hypospray! I need a hypospray over here!

(One is handed to him, and he injects Sharp.)

SHARP: (regaining consciousness) Wha... what?

HERTZLER: What happened, Commander?

SHARP: (woozy) I was... and then... (suddenly lucid; with a groan) Captain's gonna kill me.

(She taps her combadge.)

SHARP: Security alert! All hands—

LOCATION: U.S.S. ORACLE: JEFFERIES TUBES

(Rol and Lorhrok are crawling through the tubes as quickly as they can, their leather shoes banging against the grating as they hustle.)

SHARP: — *security alert!*

Intruder alert sirens (see previous uses of this siren in 10105 and 10011-10012) go off.

ROL

That didn't take long. Now we *really* don't have much time.

LORHROK

Hold on. If Starfleet computers have changed as little as everything else has in the past twenty years, I might still be able to keep them from finding us.

He flips open an access panel and starts pulling out wires, moving isolinear chips... whatever. Until otherwise noted, he's working while talking.

ROL

Can I help?

LORHROK

Yes. Go over the plan one more time for me.

ROL

You really don't think much of my engineering skills, do you?

LORHROK

It's not that, Lieutenant; it's — well... yes, it is.

Anyhow, the plan. From the top, if you don't mind. Starting with the temporal logic you worked out.

ROL

The top. Really?

LORHROK

I don't know. Something... doesn't feel quite right about it.

ROL: Fine. (clears his throat) We know that we can't change the past. Therefore, we can't save this ship, because history records that the U.S.S. *Oracle* crashes on Valandria somewhere around six centuries ago, and stays there at least until we find it twenty years ago. But history hasn't yet recorded that we found any actual *bodies* with the *Oracle* wreck. In fact, the crew of the *Oracle* was totally missing from the saucer section that we found. At the time, we assumed that either something had happened to the bodies, or that they were all with the stardrive for some reason. But now we're here, in the future, a day or two before the battle accident that causes the crash. And that gives us the opportunity to... reinterpret what we know. Specifically, we can make the leap that maybe, just maybe, there were no bodies in the saucer section because everyone *left* the *Oracle* right before it crashed, leaving the A.I. alone to go down with the ship that we found on Valandria. From there, we can even speculate that *we*—you and I—are the ones responsible for there not being any bodies in the first place, because our actions *here*, in the future, caused them all to leave the ship right before it crashed. So, now that we're going to force everyone to leave the ship before it crashes, thereby saving everyone on the *Oracle*, we're not changing history at all; we're actually fulfilling what our past future selves have already done. (takes a breath) One *bona fide* predestination paradox, courtesy of Lieutenants Rol and Lorchrok.

LORHROK: Actually, when you get right down to it, it's more of a *post-destination* paradox. The Blinovitch limitation theorem and all. (earnestly) Isn't time travel exciting? Anyhow, go on.

ROL: I'm... sorry, that gave me a headache. (pause) Before I go on: you're the engineer here, right? So, if our plan works, then it will be because it was *destined* to work? And if it fails, nothing is changed?

LORHROK: Theoretically, yes. The Novikov self-consistency principle applies. I'm done here. They won't be able to find us now... or ever.

ROL: Unless they do a meter-by-meter search for fingerprints.

LORHROK: That would take days.

ROL: True.

LORHROK: And by then not only will we be long gone, but the *Oracle* will have crashed at the Battle of Valandria. Moot point.

ROL: You're that certain of your sabotage abilities?

LORHROK: These computer systems... they're laid out almost exactly as they would be if I had designed them from the ground up. It wasn't hard to find my way around.

ROL: Hey, it's the future. Maybe you *did* design these systems.

LORHROK: Please, one mind-blowing time-loop at a time. Go on. You were just about to explain how we're going to get the *Oracle* crew off the ship right before it crashes.

(Lorhrok reaffixes the access panel to the wall and starts crawling again. Rol follows.)

ROL: (irritably) You know, this is as much your plan as it is mine.

LORHROK: True, but I'm the Acting X.O. and you're not, so I'm ordering you to explain the plan instead of me.

ROL: (exhales) Right. What we need to do is buy the *Oracle* some time, at exactly the right moment. It has to be late enough in the crash that they have no choice but to abandon ship, but early enough that they still have a chance to escape without burning up in the atmosphere. I'm almost certain that the *Oracle* crashes when they try to fire one of those really big new torpedoes at the bad guys — the Myriad or whatever — so what we have to do is reprogram the chroniton core on one of the transphasic chroniton torpedoes to produce a time differential wavefront, which will slow down objective time aboard the crashing *Oracle* to allow everyone enough *subjective* time to escape the ship before it enters the atmosphere.

LORHROK: So, for the people on the ship, time outside slows down. They can't do anything more, because power is gone, but they can still get out before the crash.

ROL: Yeah, that sums it up. Incidentally, two minutes to go.

LORHROK: That's okay, Lieutenant. We're here.

(Lorhrok presses a control panel and a Jefferies hatch slides open.)

ROL: You figure out what was bothering you about our plan?

LORHROK: No. I... can't seem to figure it out. It's like one of those songs in your head where you can hear a few notes but you can't remember anything else. (breaths) Well, the hour's getting late; let's get this done. Link me into the main computer.

(Rol starts pressing buttons on a control panel.)

ROL: Right.

LORHROK: And I'll pull up the cargo transporters...

ROL: Tied in. Ready to start reprogramming.

LORHROK: I'm starting.

(He starts entering code.)

LORHROK: Wait. I've got it.

ROL: What?

LORHROK: The thing that was bothering me. We forgot to think about what to do with the torpedo once time returns to normal speed. We can't just go and detonate it, can we?

ROL: That's... that's a problem, you're right. I... Hey, why don't we just leave it inert? The crash will already be unstoppable and the crew will have escaped.

LORHROK: Well, that would be a bit of a risk, don't you think? I mean, we'd be leaving the most powerful weapon the Federation has ever designed in any time period just sitting there inside a crash site in the past, where... ..where anyone could find it.

ROL: Doesn't seem very likely to me.

LORHROK: Unless that person were *you*.

ROL: I — well...

LORHROK: This was your plan all along, wasn't it, Rol? Give me the most confusing plan possible and, while I'm busy trying to work out the details of implementing it, you manage to sneak in and hide a *future superweapon* in the past where you can go find it and dig it up later!

ROL: You have to admit: it would further Federation interests quite a lot to be able to destroy class-six planets with four shots.

LORHROK: You lied to me!

ROL: I've been told that deceit is part of my distinctiveness.

LORHROK: The captain is going to hear about this.

(He goes back to pressing buttons on the computer screen.)

ROL: (suspiciously) What are you doing?

LORHROK: Now that I see what you were up to, I can also see a much simpler plan. I'm just writing a quick little script so that, the moment the *Oracle* fires the torpedo that causes the crash, the transporters will beam the entire crew to other nearby starships while the ship crashes.

ROL: Doesn't do *our* Federation much good.

LORHROK: (angrily) No, it doesn't do much good for "our Federation." But it *saves* these peoples' *lives*, and that's what this is *supposed* to be about!

ROL: Well, hurry. The A.I. is at ninety-nine percent. You've got about ten seconds.

LORHROK: I just finished.

ROL: Oh. Well, you've got time to spare then.

LORHROK: Good for me.

(A transporter effect)

ORACLE: *Matrix recompilization at one hundred percent. Database corruption nullified. Returning subjects to native time zone.*

SCENE 104-08**LOCATION: VALANDRIAN CATACOMBS – LOWEST LEVEL**

(Yubari, Dovan, and Betra-Na are walking down a dark tunnel, Dovan is using his tricorder.)

(The tricorder starts to make strange sounds.)

BETRA-NA: Dovan?

DOVAN: My tricorder just gave out. Interference, apparently.

(He closes the tricorder and puts it back in its holster.)

BETRA-NA: Then we are close.

DOVAN: From an optimist's standpoint, yes.

YUBARI: I suppose this means that we're going to the same place, after all.

BETRA-NA: It would seem so. As I recall, it is just around this corner.

DOVAN: Spooky blue light.

NARRATOR: Betra-Na switched off her torch as the motley party crossed the threshold into the room they had been seeking for hours. Dovan realized after a moment that he was disappointed when the chamber wasn't really all that big—a mere five by ten meters, a speck compared to the vast starship graveyard they had crossed earlier. There was a freestanding computer station across from the entrance, and both it and the power conduit that ran along the ground beneath it were clearly recent Valandrian in design. But this computer was not, as it turned out, the source of the crisp blue light that filled the chamber. Built into the wall on the far left was . . . a pillar. Dovan could swear it was made of solid marble, except that the surface color was changing. This pillar—incongruous enough with the surroundings simply by being there—was pulsing

between a billion different shades of blue and green. The slow, deliberate pattern drew Dovan's eyes towards it. And then...

LOCATION: U.S.S. TRANQUILITY: ENGINEERING (FLASHBACK)

(Warp core breach klaxon is sounding and the ship is still under heavy fire.)

COMPUTER: (simultaneous) *Thirty seconds to warp core breach. All hands, abandon ship. All hands, abandon ship.*

DOVAN: (simul.) You're in worse shape, sir! I'm getting you out of here first!

CENTAUR CREWMAN: No, Ensign! You take that beam-out! (cough) That's an order!

(Dovan taps his combadge.)

DOVAN: *Tranquility*, lock onto my signal!

CENTAUR CREWMAN: Dovan, you and I both know--!

LOCATION: VALANDRIAN CATACOMBS – LOWEST LEVEL

DOVAN: Yubari, did you feel...?

YUBARI: I was... at Yukata-chan's marriage. (pause) You too?

DOVAN: I was at the Battle of Betazed. During the War. (to Beta-Na; angry) What the hell is that thing, Premier?

BETRA-NA: (surprised) As far as I know, it's only a light source.

YUBARI: (firmly) No.

DOVAN: There was a mind at work there, too. I felt it. A *malevolent* mind.

YUBARI: (stiffly) I agree.

DOVAN: I'd lay two thousand darseks that that pillar's the source of the Wasting, Premier.

BETRA-NA: Dovan, *perhaps* you have found a lead. I myself felt... drawn... to this room when I chose the location for my secret weapons control backup. I could not explain it, except that this is one of the few rooms not patrolled by the guardian automatons and that... I was attracted to it, somehow. However, I should like to win my civil war, and then we can turn to your theory. This will only take a few sectors.

DOVAN: Hm. Very well.

(Beta-Na activates the computer, powering it up.)

BETRA-NA: I am tying into the defense network.

(Some (Valandrian) computer noises.)

BETRA-NA: Uploading my personal override codes...

BETRA-NA: There. The satellites are under my control once again. I'm preparing to send my terms of surrender to all—

SORID-GEE: (interrupting) I would reconsider that decision, Premier.

DOVAN: Sorid-Gee! Where did you--? Yubari, phaser--!

YUBARI: (interrupting) Already am, si-AGGH!

(Sorid-Gee strikes first, shooting Yubari with a Valandrian disruptor. Yubari falls to the ground.)

DOVAN: Yubari! (Dovan runs to her and crouches at her side) She's unconscious. You practically blew off her right arm!

SORID-GEE: Do not try to grab her gun —!

(Dovan grabs Yubari's phaser from the ground. He rolls out of the way as Sorid fires at him and hops to his feet before she can get another shot off.)

SORID-GEE: (coldly) Mm. Well played, Dovan.

NARRATOR: The Bolian Starfleet officer was in better shape than he looked. He had grabbed Yubari's fallen phaser, dodged Sorid-Gee's attack, and rolled to his feet before she had a chance to fire a second time. Now the muzzle of his phaser was trained on the Valandrian general. Sorid-Gee's disruptor, however, was pointed at Premier Betra-Na, who was still standing at the control computer, seemingly oblivious to the activity behind her. Dovan realized targeting the Premier was a gambit on Sorid's part. She assumed that he wouldn't shoot her because, if he did, she'd shoot the Premier, and the leaders of both factions would be killed. Dovan thought this was an awfully large leap of faith, given the low regard in which he held these people, but he seemed to have the advantage. He decided to use it.

DOVAN: Sorid-Gee. Pleasure to see you again. Tell me: was there a reason for that attack, or did you just find out you hadn't reached your Pointlessly Spilled Blood Quota for the day yet?

SORID-GEE: Premier. Step away from that console. Now.

BETRA-NA: (slowly, malevolently) As you request, General. (pause) Tell me, what happened to your guards? And to that lovely Brigadier who follows you everywhere?

SORID-GEE: Dead. Males are skilled at fighting one another, but they were no match for the flying machines we found guarding the lower levels of the catacombs. But I survived. And now I've found you... unarmed... helpless. Can you imagine a worse way to die, Premier?

BETRA-NA: I have no shortage of imagination, Oath-Traitor. As you are about to see.

(The computer buzzes with a loud and heavy-sounding alert.)

SORID-GEE: (suspiciously) What have you done to the computer?

LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR: BRIDGE

(Green alert, but some consoles are still sparking unhealthily.)

(There is a sensor alert.)

P'CHK'RO'TA: Aleczhander, I'm receiving new readings from Valandria.

LORHROK: And...?

P'CHK'RO'TA: The defense satellites are powering down.

LORHROK: (excited) What about the fighters?

P'CHK'RO'TA: For now, they look to be quite occupied with conducting their war.

LORHROK: Then let's steal our horses while the barn door's open.

P'CHK'RO'TA: Alecz?

LORHROK: All engines full, Mr. Ro'ta. Take us in.

LOCATION: VALANDRIAN CATACOMBS – SAME CHAMBER AS PREVIOUS

BETRA-NA: All I've done is make this an honest negotiation. Dovan has a bargaining token; you have a bargaining token. Now I have a bargaining token.

SORID-GEE: No riddles. What are you talking about?

BETRA-NA: The satellites have gone to a contingency mode. In five metrons, this chamber and the area around it will explode... unless I, personally, countermand the order.

(Silence.)

DOVAN: So now the whole thing comes down to a game of Chicken. Terrific.

SORID-GEE: This is not your concern, *Lieutenant Commander Dovan*. Leave here and let us settle this in our own way.

BETRA-NA: "Our own way"? You won't even pretend to the Honor Combat any longer?

SORID-GEE: (angry hiss)

DOVAN: You will address me as *Acting Captain Dovan, General*. (pause) Also, you're under arrest.

BETRA-NA: (surprised) Really, Captain? How, exactly, do you plan to accomplish that?

DOVAN: I don't, actually. It's the principle of the thing. Part of my script. Given the chance, I'd much rather kill her.

BETRA-NA: I see. But of course, if you tried to kill her, she would only use her last breath to kill *me*.

DOVAN: You know, Premier, to be perfectly honest with you, I'm still weighing the pros and cons of that in my head. And the main con here appears to be that if I do that without my ship in orbit, I die, too, when this place goes up. But if I wait five minutes, I die anyways. It's a bit of a dilemma.

BETRA-NA: (coldly) I see.

SORID-GEE: Captain Dovan, there is no reason for *either* of us to die here. I can provide a means for you to contact your ship, and I can ensure that it is not fired upon as it approaches. The two of us could escape using your teleportation devices. Beta-Na could do nothing to stop us.

(pause)

DOVAN: ... Go on.

SORID-GEE: With Beta-Na out of the way, the civil war would be a much simpler — much less bloody affair. Without her leadership against me, I predict total victory within one week.

BETRA-NA: You underestimate the fortitude of the Royal Guard.

SORID-GEE: Acceptable. (pause) Two weeks, then. (pause) Captain Dovan, I would be glad to meet your terms of non-aggression with the Fed'ration in exchange for being returned — without pomp or circumstance — to the leadership council of my revolution. A very simple deal, really. You and your female both live, I liberate my world, and your Fed'ration gets its scrap of paper... what do you call it? Your *treaty*. (pause) What do you think, Acting Captain? If you do not agree, we shall both die.

DOVAN: You're saying that you would become the leader of Valandria, and, in so doing, you would drop your anti-Federation rhetoric?

SORID-GEE: I have no love for your people, Dovan, and I still consider you a threat. There *have* been rumors that the Wasting is abroad again because of you. (pause) But, no. We would not oppose your interests.

DOVAN: You would simply rule your own people as you see fit?

SORID-GEE: Yes.

BETRA-NA: Dovan, you cannot possibly--!

DOVAN: (interrupting) (intense) And my ship and crew would go free?

SORID-GEE: Yes!

DOVAN: Hmm...

(Long pause.)

DOVAN: You know, if it's all the same to you, General, I'd rather just see to it that you die.

SORID-GEE: *What?* Is not this "treaty" of yours the very reason for your mission here?

DOVAN: Personally? I was really hoping to get trading rights.

SORID-GEE: *Trading rights?*

DOVAN: Did either of you know that I am the one of the most highly decorated officers under the rank of Captain in the whole Starfleet?

SORID-GEE: If that were true, you would surely know by now that retreat is sometimes the wiser course.

BETRA-NA: Hm. On the contrary, Sorid: Dovan has been recognized because he knows the *true* meaning of valor.

DOVAN: Wrong, on both counts. The only thing I've learned from years of winning medals is that winning medals doesn't mean a damn thing. The only thing that matters is that your people stop dying. And the only way to do *that*... is to kill the Jem'Hadar.

SORID-GEE: The *what?*

DOVAN: Look, it's a metaphor! *You're* a Jem'Hadar, Sorid-Gee. You may not have the neck tubes or the diabolic forehead or the ketracel-white fixation — you may not even know what I'm talking about — but you kill people for no good reason, and that's enough to qualify you. I'm not going to let a person like that rule *anywhere* — even on a planet of savages!

SORID-GEE: But your life! Your . . . your mission!

DOVAN: There's only one planet in our quadrant where otherwise good and powerful governments used to prop up tyrants for their own self-interest. They called it *realpolitik*, and it brought them to the brink of nuclear annihilation. Captain Cortez and her crew have been making a lot of decisions today about the value of life: when should we save it, when should we risk it, when should we lay ours down for others'. She made her decision today when she put herself in the line of fire for her crew. And I nearly went too far when I risked the whole crew for a few I couldn't save. I'm sure everyone else on the *Excelsior* has been making those same kinds of decisions for hours now, and not one of them has been simple. Except this one. Taking you down at the cost of just my life? Easiest decision I've had all day.

SORID-GEE: You . . . I will not surrender to an alien boy! You have shamed yourself by bringing him into the fight between us, Beta-Na!

BETRA-NA: As I recall this afternoon, Sorid, *you*, not I, were the one who started shooting at them.

(A second's silence.)

SORID-GEE: Neither one of you will have the courage to do this. You are cowards.

(Silence falls again.)

DOVAN: (To Beta-Na) We won't have to, if we can find another way out of this.

BETRA-NA: (resignedly) I . . . wouldn't count on that, Dovan. Two metrons to detonation.

(Pregnant pause.)

DOVAN: You know what? To hell with stalemate!

BETRA-NA: No!

NARRATOR: *Dovan fired at Sorid-Gee. Sorid-Gee dove out of the way and fired at Betra-Na. Sorid-Gee's shot hit.*

BETRA-NA: Eyahhhh!

NARRATOR: *Only Sorid-Gee and Alcar Dovan remained on their feet. Unfortunately, Sorid-Gee was faster.*

(Another Valandrian disruptor shot.)

DOVAN: (triumphant) You missed! (puzzled) By... rather a lot.

(He fires at her, but the shot goes wide.)

SORID-GEE: Look down, Dovan.

NARRATOR: *Dovan did so, and saw that he was standing on top of a power conduit. At the exact spot where Sorid-Gee had fired, the conduit was glowing bright red. Dovan realized that it was about to explode.*

DOVAN: (deeply disappointed) Oh.

(The power conduit explodes. Dovan is flung across the room. There is a shell-shocked ringing in his ears, muffling the next event.)

SORID-GEE: And now, Premier Betra-Na,
I overcome Gods and prophecy to kill
you by my own hand... and by your
own sword.

DOVAN: (simul.)
Unnnnhhh...

(The ringing fades. The fallen Dovan rolls over and picks something up with a grunt. At the same time, Sorid-Gee draws and raises her sword.)

SORID-GEE: (in a loud, low voice) For Valandria!

(Dovan fires his phaser.)

SORID-GEE: Ahhh!

DOVAN: Not. So. Fast! (breaths deeply, slowly)

(Dovan taps his combadge and begins to cross the room.)

DOVAN: Dovan to *Excelsior*! (To Betra-Na) Premier, are you--?

(Dovan's communicator starts spitting static.)

DOVAN: Dovan to *Excelsior*!

(Nothing happens)

DOVAN: Close comm channel. (To Betra-Na) Premier. Premier, can you hear me?

BETRA-NA: (moans)

DOVAN: Premier... you've been badly hurt. But you have access codes. I need those codes, or we're both going to die. Premier. Premier, can you...?

(No response.)

DOVAN: Dammit. Premier!

NARRATOR: In his focus on reviving Premier Beta-Na and preventing the explosion that would kill all four of them, Lieutenant Commander Dovan failed to notice two critical things happening around him. First, the glowing pillar had suddenly turned alabaster-white, brightening the room considerably. Second, there was someone coming up behind him, wielding a large stone. Someone who had no right at all to be conscious right now, and who, in a very real sense, wasn't. He noticed her only at the last second, as she swung the rock directly at his head.

DOVAN: (caught off guard) Jehosa — OW!

(The rock makes contact with Dovan's head.)

NARRATOR: Thanks to his quick weave, Dovan was not brained in a single hit. Instead, the rock merely slammed into the side of his head, sending him to the ground alongside the unconscious Beta-Na. Landing flat on his back, Alcar looked up into his assailant's face. (Pause.) And he saw Asuka Yubari.

DOVAN: Lieutenant... your eyes aren't supposed to be green. And they don't usually crackle with energy, either. I — hey! Put me down!

DOVAN: I take it you're not Asuka Yubari, then. (makes a choking noise as the grip tightens)

YUBARI-MYRIAD: The host body is pleasant... but not relevant. You are going to die.

DOVAN: Happens... to the best of us! (urk!)

(He has to struggle to get out the words.)

DOVAN: You're... owner... of this vessel?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We are.

DOVAN: W—why... doing this?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: Because we have waited eight thousand years to do it.

DOVAN: Bad... *answer!* (with great effort, he starts to knee her) Eeungh!

NARRATOR: *And then, with a knee to the solar plexus, Commander Dovan knocked the wind out of his possessed companion.*

YUBARI-MYRIAD: (wheezes horribly, as one normally does when the wind is knocked out of them)

DOVAN: You semi-corporeals... Always forget to watch out for the body you're in. Okay, now I have a phaser and you have a rock. So let's talk. I presume you're the one behind all this?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: (pause; clipped) Yes.

DOVAN: Who are you? What are you called?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We are many things in many tongues. We are the Many. The Myriad. The Numerous. We are Legion... for we are the Many.

DOVAN: What are you doing here?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We crashed.

DOVAN: Obviously. What have you been doing since then?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: Manipulating events.

DOVAN: Why?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: For the war effort.

DOVAN: The future war.

YUBARI-MYRIAD: Yes.

DOVAN: The Valandrin used to to be vegetarians. What did you do to them?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We found their ancestors and whispered in their minds. Taught them my ways. Tested them. Forged them. Today, they are beautiful.

DOVAN: Interesting standard of beauty. More Screwtape than Legion. (pause) Are you the Valandrian Gods?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We whisper in their minds even today. We destroy the weaklings, even today. Does this make me a God?

DOVAN: What about these catacombs?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: Our former vessel, *Skysplitter-Skywounder*, crashed in the history with the many-accursed Starfleet prototype *Oracle-Harbinger-Omen*... but we crash so much nearer to the beginning of history than them.

DOVAN: I appreciate your honesty. I am now most definitely going to destroy you. Are you willing to tell me how to do that?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: We will die when this chamber explodes and destroys our Receptacle and this host body.

DOVAN: Aren't you planning to escape?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: Our work is already complete. The war will be won, and won decisively. You are merely... dessert.

DOVAN: Ah. I hope your death hurts, then. (pause) Thousand darsek question: what is the Wasting?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: I am the Wasting. We reach into your minds and tell them to be sick. Your crew is sick. Your crew is going to die.

(Eerie silence.)

DOVAN: (darkly) Last one: Why are you answering these questions so easily?

YUBARI-MYRIAD: To give us time to reach into your mind and tell it to be sick.

DOVAN: I... Oh, no.

NARRATOR: Dovan could feel a new and horrifying pain begin to creep towards his body from all the extremities, getting closer by the microsecond. With his last moment, he spun to the right and leveled his phaser at the far wall. He left the back of his head vulnerable to Yubari's big rock, he knew. What's more, the shining white pillar would be destroyed in a few more seconds anyway if he just waited for the self-destruct. But, somehow, it just felt didn't feel right for anyone but him to blow the Receptacle to smithereens.

(Dovan fires at full power at the pillar, making it explode.)

DOVAN: (in pain) Ahh... Ahh! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!

(Transported beam.)

LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR: TRANSPORTER ROOM

(The Transporter is having trouble rematerializing.)

LORHROK: I... I'm having trouble holding onto Yubari's signal!

WESTLAKE: Is it the interference?

LORHROK: No, I've compensated for that. Even though it looks like something really big just blew up down there. No, this is... Oh, no. There's a second neural pattern.

WESTLAKE: What?

LORHROK: There are *two minds* in her body! We can't put two minds in the same body! I... I think I just killed someone!

WESTLAKE: There's no time to worry about that, Alecz. If we don't restart the rematerialization process, we'll lose the real Yubari and everyone else we're trying to beam up.

LORHROK: I... I understand. Removing the second signal. Get a medical team down here.

(As Westlake starts talking into his combadge. Lorhrok begins rematerialization again. This time, it succeeds.)

WESTLAKE: Transporter Room to Sickbay! Priority medical emergency!

(The rematerialization finishes.)

LORHROK: Commander!

DOVAN: Mr. Lorhrok. Well-timed. A few moments sooner and it would have been an anti-climax.

LORHROK: Yes... but a few moments *later* and you'd've been dead.

DOVAN: I'm... going to collapse now.

(Dovan collapses.)

LORHROK: Sickbay; Transporter Room! *Double* that emergency! I repeat: *Two* medical emergencies in the Transporter Room!

ROL: *Bridge to Transporter Room. Lieutenant, I note your transport was successful. Permission to break orbit?*

LORHROK: By all means, Lieutenant. Get us out of here before those fighters come after us.

ROL: *Gladly, Lieutenant. Bridge out.*

(Pause.)

WESTLAKE: Alec, did you . . . was it just me, or were Lieutenant Yubari's eyes glowing when she materialized?

LORHROK: You saw it too? I thought it was a trick of the light. Green, right?

WESTLAKE: Yeah. And it faded away after a second.

LORHROK: Well, whatever it was, it's —

(The transporter room doors open, admitting a medical team.)

SHARP: Get those people on stretchers. Move!

LORHROK: The X.O. . . . I think he's been infected. By the Wasting.

SHARP: In that case... Nurse, I need twenty cc's of the Simon Serum to keep Alcar stable!

ROJAN: Yes, ma'am!

SHARP: (to Lorhrok, aside) Thank you, Lieutenant. We'll take it from here.

WESTLAKE: Well... what now, Alec?

LORHROK: You know? One way or another... I think we're done here. Let's head back to Engineering and see where we stand.

(They exit the Transporter room.)

SCENE 104-09

LOCATION: U.S.S. EXCELSIOR: CORRIDOR

DOVAN: Acting Captain's Log, Supplemental. It's been one Valandrian day since Mr. Lorhrok's timely rescue of the Away Team — that's about seventeen hours, for you circadians out there. We're preparing to get underway for our return home. Whatever the source of the Wasting was, we definitely seem to have destroyed it — there have been no new infections since I blew up the glowing pillar in the catacombs. Dr. Sharp has been successful in creating a treatment based on Simon Westlake's unique brain chemistry. The ones who were infected at the very end are already beginning to recover; this morning, a full twenty-five percent of the crew, including me, was conscious. The Doctor is concerned that others, who were farther along in the infection, may still remain in comas for weeks — or, worst-case, for years — but, as long as the deaths have stopped, I'm willing to put off worrying about it until we're back at a Starbase.

Strange happenings on Valandria since our showdown. Premier Beta-Na, both as legitimate ruler of Valandria as well as the person who wasn't trying to kill us all day, has been given official custody of Sorid-Gee. It was expected that Beta-Na would have her publicly executed in order to quell the rebellion, but — and here's the strange part — when she contacted the rival clans to inform them of her victory, she found them already prepared to talk. For some reason, all the fight has gone out of them. I have my suspicions as to why, of course, but I'm not certain the Premier or her prisoner believed me when I told them about the beings that lived inside the glowing pillar and took control of Lieutenant Yubari. For now, the Premier has chalked it up as a mystery, and ordered a planetwide day of rest and mourning before talks begin. Nonetheless... Somehow, I wouldn't now be at all surprised to learn, five or ten years from now, that the Valandrin had all become vegetarians. End log.

(Footsteps catching up.)

LORHROK: Morning-after assessment, sir.

DOVAN: Mm. What's the damage?

LORHROK: Well, sir, when I saw the nacelles, I just about screamed. Turns out *someone* tried to pull an L-4 with a *Sovereign*-class starship.

DOVAN: Don't look at me.

LORHROK: (wry) I wasn't. Bottom line, we can't top Warp 4. The trip back to the Gateway is going to take a few weeks.

DOVAN: Darn. I was hoping we'd be back in time for the crew to have a Christmas shore leave. They've certainly earned it.

LORHROK: 'Fraid not, sir. But we should make it by New Years', if our repair estimates hold out.

DOVAN: New Year's already? It seems like twenty-three eighty-two just started. (sighs relaxedly)

LORHROK: Actually, sir, there is something else I'd like to bring to your attention.

DOVAN: Yes?

LORHROK: When we were in the future, aboard the *Oracle*... I had some... problems with Mr. Rol.

DOVAN: (sympathetic) Oh, no. I hope he didn't give you any of that ridiculous Temporal Prime Directive claptrap.

LORHROK: (taken aback) Not... exactly, sir.

DOVAN: Look, Lieutenant. The plan the two of you came up with was terrific. I don't think I'd ever have thought of it, and it was a brilliant way to save lives while still respecting the Time Laws. But if you're ever in a situation where you're faced with a decision between regulations and lives, and you *can't* come up with a perfect solution

like that, you don't let *anybody* push you into deciding against those lives. Even someone twice your age like Rol. And I'll back you up every step of the way if some brass hat tries to court-martial you for breaking his silly little rulebook. Regulation one fifty-seven slash three slash eighteen doesn't trump our primary mission. You follow me?

LORHROK: I... see, sir.

DOVAN: As long as we're on the topic... From what you told me about that future you visited... the Federation in a hopeless war, an alliance with the Borg, entire planets blown to smithereens one both sides... I sure hope it's just an alternate future... just one possibility among many.

(Pause.)

LORHROK: I think, sir, that whether or not that timeline comes to pass will have a lot to do with what we've done here today.

DOVAN: And what we're going to do from here on in.

LORHROK: Yes.

DOVAN: In other words... the rabbit hole goes a lot deeper than we thought. And we're going to have to go all the way down before the end.

LORHROK: That's... how it seems to me, Commander.

(They stop walking.)

DOVAN: Well... I'm sure Captain Cortez will know what to do. You ready?

LORHROK: Oh, I've seen enough Valandrin for this week. And I have a devil of a report to write anyways.

DOVAN: (sarcastic) Thanks a bundle, Lieutenant!

(Lorhrok starts walking.)

LORHROK: Anytime, sir!

DOVAN: (takes a breath to compose himself)

(Dovan enters transporter room 3.)

BETRA-NA: Commander Dovan.

DOVAN: Premier. You seem to be recovering well.

BETRA-NA: Your doctors are . . . excellent practitioners of their art. I hope they have been rewarded with many husbands.

DOVAN: (diplomatically) I . . . I'll look into it.

(Pause.)

BETRA-NA: Dovan, I hope you understand why I can make no treaty with your people today.

DOVAN: (exhales sadly) I had hoped that you might change your mind.

BETRA-NA: (sadly) It is a new day for the Valandrian people. By the Tribes, so much has happened in so little time! The Oracle gone; the old order overturned; the Wasting come again, then vanished like a dream . . . It will be a long time before we remember who we are . . . or who we're meant to be. But know this, Commander Dovan: we do not forget our heroes. Come to us again someday, and we will see what there is to discuss of treaties.

(She turns away and steps onto the transporter pad.)

BETRA-NA: I am ready.

DOVAN: Best of luck, Madam Premier.

BETRA-NA: *Incu resit tomara tollanna kaieeme.* (pause) Don't look so confused, Dovan. It is the formal salutation *owed* to great leaders. (sympathetic) Of course, in our whole history, no *male* has ever heard it before.

DOVAN: I—

(Speechless silence)

DOVAN: Energize.

(The transporter captures Beta-Na in a column of blue light, and she is gone.)

(Pause. Then Dovan taps his combadge.)

DOVAN: Bridge!

ROL: *Rol here, sir.*

DOVAN: Lieutenant, lay in a course for Starbase. Best speed.

ROL: Aye, sir. (pause) Course plotted.

DOVAN: (strongly) Go.

LOCATION: EXT. SPACE

(The *Excelsior* powers up its engines and jumps to warp.)

END CREDITS

SCENE 104-10**LOCATION: A NONDESCRIPT ROOM**

(Incoming transmission alert.)

(GENERAL BRAHMS answers the summons with a press of the intercom.)

BRAHMS: Go ahead.

SECRETARY: *General Brahms. You have an incoming message, marked urgent.*

BRAHMS: Who is it?

SECRETARY: *From... Codename Syracuse, sir. Recorded early this morning.*

BRAHMS: (gravely) Syracuse... she's early. Put it through to me.

SECRETARY: *Yes, sir.*

(Brahms's screen lights up.)

CORTEZ: *General. (reassuring) Don't worry; there's no sign of infiltration aboard the Excelsior. (grave) It's the scans, Isaac. Yubari handed me the first batch this morning. She had... no idea what they were. I told her it was just a high-resolution mapping job, standard scouting procedure. But, of course, you and I know what those scans represent. And it's worse than we thought. Much worse. There's been a breach, General. The Excelsior should be finished at Valandria by tomorrow, and, when we return, you have to be ready to take... drastic measures. Our survival depends on it. I'll talk to you soon. In person. Cortez out.*

(Transmission end beep.)

BRAHMS: Operations!

SECRETARY: *Operations here, General.*

BRAHMS: Signal the dock crews. The *Renegade* needs to be ready by morning.

SECRETARY: *Right away, sir. Are we going somewhere, sir?*

BRAHMS: Yes. We're going to meet the *Excelsior*. Brahms out.