

Starship Excelsior
"Fear Itself"
(Season 4, Episode 5)
by Joel Jordan

Transcribed by Peter Stine

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

SCENE 405-00**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - CONFERENCE ROOM**

(Lorhrok quietly working on some executive officer stuff. He is quietly singing "Beyond Antares" to himself.)

LORHROK: ...*Forever is just a day.*

Forever is just another journey

Tomorrow a stop

(doors open; Yubari enters)

along the — Lieutenant Yubari?

YUBARI: Lieutenant Lorhrok. I thought the captain would be in here.

LORHROK: Ah. Yes. He had to do something to appease the Morexians, poor man, so he asked me to hold court for him this morning. He told me you'd come by for this week's command training assignment.

YUBARI: You know about that?

LORHROK: I'm the first officer. I know more about it than the captain does. And I think you're ready for your first live exercise.

YUBARI: That sounds... dangerous.

LORHROK: It might be, but probably not in the way you're thinking. Two *Excelsior* department heads aren't getting along. It's gotten so bad that the head of Department A has ordered his people to stop all contact with Department B, and the head of Department B has gone to the captain to request formal censure of Department A.

YUBARI: That's unacceptable. It's unprofessional. It's conduct unbecoming!

LORHROK: Which is why the captain asked me to try handling it through back channels — if he has to get directly involved, he'll have no choice but to bash their heads together, so I'm supposed to find an unofficial solution. So, command quiz: how would you handle this?

YUBARI: Hm. (Pause) I'd confront both heads of department, together. Inform them each that they both have one day to start acting like Starfleet officers. They don't have to be buddies, just colleagues. If they can't settle their differences, I'd send them to the holodeck to work things out without regard for rank — and alert sickbay to expect a casualty.

LORHROK: (with a little chuckle) You know, that's actually not a bad idea. But — it's the wrong answer.

YUBARI: How so? It solves the problem.

LORHROK: No, it doesn't. The right answer was a question, Lieutenant. You can't make a decision without complete information, and you don't even know which departments are involved here. As a matter of fact, our feuding staff are The Major, head of the marines, and Lio the Barkeep, head of the civilian union.

YUBARI: They're not in the naval command structure. They aren't our responsibility.

LORHROK: Oh, sure, that's what the regulations say, but they're still aboard our ship. Lio's been speaking ill of the marine detachment, arguing that they represent what's wrong with Starfleet. Word's getting around. The Major's forbidden his troops from attending any functions in the Delta Lounge until Lio is censured. And, you're right: you can't give either of them a direct order on this matter — not even the captain can completely ignore marine autonomy. But a true commander has to be able to give orders that other people will follow — not because they have to, but because they want to.

YUBARI: And I can't just bash their heads together?

LORHROK: Ah, see, you're already learning to ask questions. But the answer to that one is no. Think of it like... settling a argument between siblings. Do you have any sisters, Lieutenant?

YUBARI: A brother. I don't think that's good advice for me, sir.

LORHROK: You and your brother didn't get along?

YUBARI: When he was bored, Bezu tried to murder me.

LORHROK: That's terrible! How old were you?

YUBARI: We were at the beach. I was eight, I think. Nine. The first time.

LORHROK: Um. Perhaps we'll try something different, then.

(He pulls out a pocketwatch on a gold chain and hands it to Yubari.)

YUBARI: What is it?

(She opens it with a click; we hear it ticking.)

LORHROK: It's a pocketwatch. Joshua Underwood gave it to the captain before he left. Said Commodore Grenn gave it to him when she was promoted away. He doesn't know where she got it. The captain and I think you should have it for a few days. Just to get the feel.

YUBARI: It says Stardate Six-oh-six-three-one-point-four. (pause) How can a mechanical watch know the current stardate?

LORHROK: Nobody knows. Underwood says it's a Novachron master watch, at least three centuries old. Like all Novachron watches, when you try to open it up, the components turn to dust. But it always, always tells you the correct time, according to the local time system, no matter what it is or where you are. (blink) Now that I wear a red uniform, I try every day to be as adaptable as this watch. I've learned that's what it's all about – not pips, not rulebooks, not even high ideals. You have to be able to get the job done, exactly right, no matter the situation.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Interesting metaphor, sir.

(Intercom activates.)

ROL: *Lieutenant Lorhrok to the bridge.*

(Lorhrok hits his combadge.)

LORHROK: On my way. Join me, Leftenant.

SCENE 405-01**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR READY ROOM**

DOVAN: Captain's Log, supplemental. Despite their suspicions, our first contact mission to the Morexian Unity concluded on a genial note after all – thanks to Ensign Rol's quick thinking and impressive fashion sense. Under Morexian treaty law, I am now required to record and transmit a full, verbal accounting of Federation net and gross exports, by type and volume, during the last fiscal year, which I am happy to do as a show of good faith. (pause) Ahem. (clears throat) (padd beep) ...from Planet 'aucdet Nine, three gross of self-sealing stem bolts, two thousand wrappages of [Cardassian yamok sauce, fifty thousand pounds of fish-meat]

(Comm whistle)

LORHROK: *Bridge to Captain Dovan.*

DOVAN: Thank the Lords. (He hits his combadge.) I'm on my way.

(Dovan instantly rises and heads for the bridge.)

LORHROK: *That really*

LOCATION: BRIDGE

LORHROK: *Isn't necessary, sir.*

NEEVA: Captain on the bridge.

DOVAN: Too late, Exec; I'm here. What've we got?

ROL: A small starship, unknown configuration, just ahead.

LORHROK: I just thought you'd want to be aware, Captain. I've never seen a design like this, but the warp field has a clear Federation energy signature.

DOVAN: Transponder codes?

LORHROK: (He checks his console) Actually, yes. The ship identifies as the *Nagging Stella*, a merchant outfit out of F'hoca Prime.

YUBARI: They're hailing.

DOVAN: On screen.

(The viewscreen activates.)

DOVAN: This is Captain Alcar Dovan of the Federation Starship *Excelsior*. How can I help you, Mister...?

MUDD: *Mudd! I am Jefferson Tiberius Mudd, noble captain – master businessman and intergalactic explorer plenipotential. Perhaps you've heard of me?*

DOVAN: Did you... need something from us?

MUDD: *Perhaps you need something from me, friend captain!*

DOVAN: Oh?

MUDD: *Maps, dossiers, a little contraband Zath whiskey – all profits to the Zathana Fund Against the Occupation, of course! – many things of use to a lonely starship in the depths of space.*

DOVAN: The Zath Fund Against the Occupation, really? Well, in that case, prepare for ship-to-ship transport, Mister Mudd!

MUDD: *With pleasure, good sir!*

DOVAN: *Excelsior* out.

(The viewscreen deactivates.)

DOVAN: Mister Rol? Beam our guest directly to the bridge. Miz Yubari, I want you standing right next to me for this.

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

(Yubari walks over.)

LORHROK: Something wrong, sir?

DOVAN: Can you grab the hard currency supply, Alecz?

LORHROK: Sure; I'll be right back.

(Lorhrok exits the bridge.)

ROL: Target locked.

DOVAN: Energize.

(Mudd materializes.)

MUDD: What a grand ship, sir! An exemplary captain you must be if Starfleet has entrusted you to steer so mighty a vessel!

DOVAN: True, Admiral Parker does consider me an example. Though... not the flattering kind. This is my aide, Lieutenant Yubari.

YUBARI: Sir? Shouldn't Lieutenant [Lorhrok be introduced first?]

DOVAN: Go ahead, Lieutenant. Shake the man's hand.

MUDD: When I was just a lad, my grandfather told me stories about meeting angels in space. Of course, I never believed him — — until now, that is.

YUBARI: You're too kind. Sir.

(Lorhrok re-enters. He presents something to Dovan, which clinks a little.)

LORHROK: The latinum, sir. Our funding for any trades we make in this quadrant.

(Dovan begins to lead Yubari and Mudd off the bridge into the conference room.)

DOVAN: Thank you, Mister Lorhrok. We'll be in the conference room; you have the conn.

LORHROK: Aye, sir. I have the conn.

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CONFERENCE ROOM

DOVAN: So, Mister Mudd, where did you get all this information to sell? You're human — aren't you a bit far from home?

MUDD: Indeed, captain, I am, like yourself, a citizen of the Federation. But doing business in the Federation is so... suffocating. So I bravely became a pioneer, crossing through the Gateway with nothing but my ship and a gleam in my eye. Here, I took on my life's work: promoting peace, understanding, and the free flow of goods among the peoples on this side.

DOVAN: It's a touchy business sometimes, isn't it?

MUDD: Quite, sir, quite! It takes men of resolve and dedication — such as ourselves — to tread the high-wire of diplomacy. I learned the trade from my father and grandfather before me.

DOVAN: Our current course takes us into what locals are calling the Sernaix Sector. What can you tell me?

MUDD: I'm sorry, captain, but I cannot simply give away my merchandise. We must think of the Zath orphans.

DOVAN: How much are you asking?

MUDD: For the complete, fully-featured sector map and glossary? Only a little latinum. Nine bars.

DOVAN: Nine bars? We aren't that well funded!

MUDD: Alas, I'm nearly giving it to you at cost. My margins leave me little room for barter.

DOVAN: I'm going to want a sample first.

MUDD: No samples, captain, and that's for your own good. The 59th Rule of Acquisition: Free advice is seldom cheap!

DOVAN: Five bars.

MUDD: Eight.

DOVAN: Four bars three strips and it's just going down from there.

(Pause.)

MUDD: Done. (he pulls a padd out of his coat and starts pressing buttons) The map will be in your computer database in a few moments, captain. You drive a stubborn bargain!

DOVAN: While my lieutenant counts out your money, I want the executive summary.

MUDD: Of course, my dear friend! You should turn around and go back the other way. The Sernaix Sector is home to the Star Fountain. Every sane starfaring power in the area avoids it.

DOVAN: The "star fountain"?

MUDD: A spatial anomaly, captain. Quite haunted. Quite, quite haunted.

DOVAN: You sound like you speak from experience.

MUDD: I've seen men who came back from there, captain. Strong men. They never spoke about it. But they were never the same. Turn back, now. That's the only thing you need to know about the Sernaix Sector. (pause) Can I have my money now, captain?

DOVAN: Yes, of course. Four bars... (big bars clink on the table) ...and three strips... (smaller clinks)

MUDD: A pleasure doing business with you, Captain Dovan. However, if you plan to continue on this hazardous course, I hope you won't think me rude if I repair myself to my humble ship.

DOVAN: Actually, Mister Mudd, there is one other thing...

MUDD: Yes?

DOVAN: Being a Starfleet captain involves quite a bit of paperwork, as I'm sure you can understand. And, it just happens, I saw your name cross my desk just this morning.

MUDD: You did.

DOVAN: Let me check here on this padd... Yes! Just as I thought! It's a warrant for your arrest, Mister Mudd. Miss Yubari, cuff him.

(Yubari steps forward and handcuffs Mudd — do we have a sound effect for space handcuffs? — and, though Mudd doesn't resist, he is furious.)

MUDD: Impossible! This is an outrage! There must be some mistake! The Federation has no jurisdiction out here!

YUBARI: Perhaps you'd like to hear the charges?

MUDD: I'm innocent!

DOVAN: You did business with the Morexian Unity some weeks back, didn't you?

MUDD: Our business was perfectly legal!

DOVAN: Fraud is never legal.

MUDD: Captain Dovan, sir, you wound me!

YUBARI: No, he doesn't. But I might.

DOVAN: You made quite a poor impression on the Morexians, Mister Mudd. So poor that, when we arrived, they nearly opened fire on us.

MUDD: It was all a perfectly innocent misunderstanding!

DOVAN: Then you should have no trouble explaining things to their High Curia.

MUDD: The High Curia?

DOVAN: To whom you are going to make a personal apology.

MUDD: But the penalty for fraud on Morex is death!

DOVAN: As you pointed out, this is their jurisdiction, not the Federation's. I suggest you make your apology convincing.

MUDD: That's... that's all hearsay! Circumstantial! Besides, you entrapped me!

DOVAN: No, Mister Mudd, I'm afraid you asked us to beam you aboard. I made sure of that.

MUDD: Oh, dear...

YUBARI: Brig reports ready for the prisoner, captain.

DOVAN: And I'll be confiscating that latinum you just received, Mister Mudd. (clink clink) State's evidence, you understand. Energize.

(Mudd beams out.)

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Captain? You called me your "aide."

DOVAN: Well, I didn't want Mudd to realize I was dragging him into a room with my chief of security, did I? I'm just glad I didn't screw up and call you "Commander" again. You'll be earning that title for real soon enough, the way you're working. Thanks for the briefing on Mudd this morning.

YUBARI: I knew he'd be in this sector, but I didn't expect him to fly right into our loving embrace. That was lucky.

DOVAN: Most of good luck is just good planning. Which is probably why I have so little of it.

(They both swiftly exit back to the bridge.)

LOCATION: BRIDGE

NEEVA: Captain on the bridge!

LORHROK: Mister Mudd's resting comfortably in the brig, then, I take it?

YUBARI: I may have forgotten to have them turn down the sheets and lay out the complimentary mints.

ROL: Where to, Captain?

DOVAN: Straight on. The Sernaix Sector awaits. (pause) And hit it.

(The ship jumps to warp.)

MAIN CREDITS

SCENE 405-02**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* drops out of warp.)

LOCATION: BRIDGE

LORHROK: So this is the haunted Star Fountain?

YUBARI: It doesn't look like much. Just a big space cloud.

ROL: It's beautiful. The colors are... wonderful. Have you ever seen that shade of gold?

LORHROK: Report, Commander Neeva.

NEEVA: It looks a lot like a white hole phenomenon, sir, but I've never seen a white hole act quite like this — it's almost... pulsating. Like a beating heart. Or a tide.

DOVAN: I don't think I follow.

NEEVA: White holes spew matter into space. And, look: we can see that happening — those long iridisecent strings radiating from the cloud in the center. But, see those black streaks? Something near the poles is also pulling matter back in.

DOVAN: Like a heart.

LORHROK: You've got it, Alcar. Mister Meyers, secondary analysis.

MEYERS: Aye.

LORHROK: Anything else on navigational sensors, Bev?

ROL: The usual celestial jetsam, sir.

NEEVA: I can prep a class-4 singularity probe. We should be able to find out what's at the center without actually entering.

ROL: Why wouldn't we want to enter?

LORHROK: You have to admit, it is a little spooky.

YUBARI: Really? (sensor alert.) Captain, I'm picking up a faint signal from deep inside the Star Fountain. A distress call.

LORHROK: See? Spooky.

DOVAN: On speakers.

ALIEN: *...Repeat, if anyone is [out] there, please! We [need] immediate assistance!*

DOVAN: Can we reply?

(Yubari presses a few buttons.)

YUBARI: You're on, sir.

DOVAN: This is Captain Alcar Dovan of the Federation Starship *Excelsior*, responding to your distress call. What is your status?

ALIEN: *[We're a] survey vessel. [We] entered the [Star] Fountain to search for the Iconian treasure world [they say is] at the center. But we [were] trapped in a gravimetric [field].*

LORHROK: Iconian treasure world?

NEEVA: Could they have found Avalon? Here?

DOVAN: Alien vessel, how can we help?

ALIEN: *Main power [is offline.] Life support failing. We need [some of your] dilithium [to] re-energize the drives. Please, [you must] hurry. Two other passing ships have already ignored our plea!*

DOVAN: We'll see you in a few hours, sir or madam. *Excelsior* out.

LORHROK: Helm, full impulse, take us into the anomaly.

ROL: All ahead, aye.

LORHROK: All hands, yellow alert.

DOVAN: Now let's show these lost souls what Federation moral superiority is all about!

LORHROK: Sir, remember when you asked me to tell you whenever your inspiring speeches weren't so inspiring?

DOVAN: Vaguely.

ROL: Now penetrating the outer boundary layer.

(The *Excelsior* shudders. At the same instant, all the power systems spike for just a second before returning to normal levels.)

ROL: What the...

NEEVA: ...hell? Engineering, this is the bridge, what just happened?

J'NAYA: *I can't explain it, Neeva. There was a power fluctuation. Like the whole ship just... blinked.*

MEYERS: Sir, my console's still offline.

LORHROK: Crack open the panel and take a look, Jack. I'll be there in a minute.

(Meyers removes the access panel.)

DOVAN: Blinked how? Science analogies were never my strong suit.

J'NAYA: *I'll... try to explain, sir. It's like [standing on top of a can, except, that's actually the analogy from the last episode, isn't it, but it doesn't matter because you interrupted me at the brackets and nobody ever hears the rest of the line. Right?]*

(A BRILLIANT, VIOLENTLY SPARKING BLUE ORB emerges from the hatch, rotating in midair. There is music in the background. The piece is: "Coker's Interlude")

LORHROK: What the spast?

DOVAN: What is that spinning blue light and what is it doing on my [ship?]

(Meyers screams in pain and terror)

ROL: Jack!

LORHROK: Rol, stay back! It's dangerous!

MEYERS: Out! Before they get through!

YUBARI: Rol, you're in my line of fire.

ROL: Jack, what are you [trying to say?]

MEYERS: We have to get out NOW! OUT!

DOVAN: Chief John Meyers, stand to attention!

MEYERS: N000000000!

(Meyers lunges at Dovan. Yubari fires a phaser. Meyers' body hits the floor. The BLUE ORB vanishes, instantly.)

(The music stops instantly as well.)

ROL: Captain, the light is gone!

DOVAN: I can see that, Mister Rol. Yubari, good shot. Sickbay, please beam Jack Meyers to a biobed and hold him for observation.

MAIEK: *Doctor Maiek here. Acknowledged.*

(Meyers dematerializes.)

DOVAN: What was that thing? A weapon? An attack? And where is it now? Suggestions.

NEEVA: It disappeared. It may not be onboard anymore.

YUBARI: We don't get that lucky around here. I'll organize a search party.

LORHROK: Did anyone even get a good look at it? It happened so fast.

ROL: I saw it. It was a sparkling blue sphere. Too bright to look at it directly. It came out of the access panel Jack was working on. Actually, I think it floated right through the duranium. It looked... fierce. And when it touched him...

LORHROK: Captain, I recommend we survey the Star Fountain with probes and identify the exact status of the alien ship before we go any deeper.

DOVAN: Their life support's failing. We don't have time. Neeva, sensors. Yubari, security sweep. Find out what that thing was and where it is now.

SCENE 404-03**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(Yubari approaches a door and puts her hand on a panel.)

YUABRI: Brig access, Yubari, authorization Bezu-two-two-seven.

LOCATION: BRIG

(The large doors open. Yubari approaches a cell.)

YUBARI: Mister Hertzler?

HERTZLER: Ma'am?

YUBARI: The prisoner is comfortable?

HERTZLER: Yes, ma'am.

MUDD: Ah, my jailer has arrived! My beautiful, *recherché* jailer!

YUBARI: I really don't want to hear it, Mudd.

MUDD: Ah, Lieutenant Yubari, you should not be so quick to... Wait. Nononowait. *Yubari*. I know that name. Why do I know that name? Yubari, Yubari, Yubari... YOO-bah-ree! YOObahree Ahska!

YUBARI: I haven't been called that in years. Who told you [that name?]

MUDD: You're Bezu's sister! The one he was always talking about!

YUBARI: Bezu? How did you know my brother?

MUDD: Who would have guessed you'd be the perfect woman! When that Bezu nose...

YUBARI: I gave him that nose. Broke it when we were children.

MUDD: Goodness, madam! A little tyke like that?

YUBARI: He was beating me. That time, I fought back. A mistake I paid for, dearly. How do you know him?

MUDD: Oh... you know. When you live life on the high seas of adventure, from time to time you're bound to come across a fellow sailor!

YUBARI: LIAR! What did you buy from him? Drugs? Guns?

MUDD: Nothing so nefarious, madam! This was, oh, nearly ten years ago, now – I was trafficking in urgently needed medical supplies.

YUBARI: You sold black market medical supplies during the height of the Dominion War.

MUDD: They were of only the highest quality.

YUBARI: That just means they were stolen from the best medical ships on the front! Do you know how many troops died because of that piracy?!

MUDD: You make me sound so villainous, my dear. Tell me, whatever happened to old Bezu? He vanished from all my contacts a few years after the treaty was signed.

YUBARI: Intelligence caught up with him. He turned informant, gave us a lot of lowlifes like you. Now he's retired on Nayjeb Prime.

MUDD: Nayjeb Prime? Really? Who's telling lies now, YOObahree Ahska?

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Mr. Hertzler?

HERTZLER: Sir?

YUBARI: Adjust brig forcefield to prevent sound from escaping Mr. Mudd's cell.

HERTZLER: Yes, ma'am. Turning on the mute button.

MUDD: Oh, but jailer! That seems very [unfair.]

YUBARI: No one is to speak to Mister Mudd, for any reason, without my express authorization. Is that clear?

HERTZLER: Yes, ma'am.

(Mudd starts banging on the forcefield with his fists.)

YUBARI: And if he keeps banging on the forcefield like that?

HERTZLER: Yes, ma'am?

YUBARI: Up the voltage.

(Yubari exits.)

SCENE 405-04**LOCATION: SICKBAY**

SHARP: All I can tell you is that my eyes say that Jack Meyers is in a coma, but all the instruments say he isn't. There's no medical reason for it. Doctor Maiek here is working on a theory, but that's all it is for now.

DOVAN: Theory?

MAIEK: Perhaps the reason is psychic, sir. On Romulus, my father oversaw failed experiments to weaponize the latent psychic powers of Remans. A few of his test subjects ended up in comas with no obvious medical cause.

DOVAN: Prove it. Better: solve it.

MAIEK: Yes, sir.

(Maiek starts to work. Scans and such.)

(Dovan starts to walk away. Sharp follows.)

SHARP: Alcar.

DOVAN: Yeah?

SHARP: If you'd heeded Jeff Mudd's warning and stayed away from the Star Fountain, Jack wouldn't be in this coma.

DOVAN: Melissa, if I heeded every spacer warning sent my way, we'd be spending this entire mission alone, charting safe-looking gas clouds. That's not what Jack Meyers signed up for. And it doesn't sound like you, either.

SHARP: I signed up as a career move, and I got stuck here because of you. I've gotta get back to my patient.

DOVAN: Of course.

(Sharp heads back, and, a moment later, Dovan exits to the corridor.)

SCENE 405-05**LOCATION: SECURITY OFFICE**

YUBARI: From the windows, it looks like the *Excelsior's* flying through a bowl of milk.

MAJOR: I don't know what it is, ma'am, but I'm not ashamed to admit that it gives me the willies.

(Yubari checks a console.)

YUBARI: Port sensor sweep complete. No contacts.

(The Major hums a few bars of "Coker's Interlude".)

YUBARI: What's that you're humming?

MAJOR: Hm? Oh. No idea, ma'am. It's been stuck in my head all day. The next part goes...

(Yubari hums the very next few bars of "Coker's Interlude".)

MAJOR: Oh, you know it, ma'am! What is it?

YUBARI: No idea. It's been stuck in my head all day, too.

(There's a sensor alert at the Major's console, which he checks.)

MAJOR: Ma'am, deck Twenty-Six reports all sweeps complete.

YUBARI: Anything?

MAJOR: No evidence of a blue sphere of any kind, on the ship or off, ma'am.

YUBARI: Damn! (pause) Thank the marines for assisting my security teams on this.

MAJOR: We were happy to help, ma'am.

YUBARI: I'll make sure the rest of the crew hears about it, too. Even the civilians.

MAJOR: Aha. You've heard Mister Lio's "opinions", then.

YUBARI: Not directly. Not yet. But I know the feuding has to stop. A starship can't operate with two of its pillars at odds.

MAJOR: (snorts) The marine detachment, ma'am, is this starship's expeditionary security force and first line of combat defense. Lio pours drinks.

YUBARI: The ship doesn't operate at peak efficiency without both of you.

MAJOR: My troops, ma'am, do not operate at peak efficiency when a little bald man with a stupid mustache sits around all day telling half the crew that we're the reason this ship has so many casualties.

YUBARI: I understand that, Major, but [you have to remember how isolated the marines are from the rest of the ship.]

MAJOR: Respectfully, ma'am, there's no "but" there. There can't be. Especially not from you.

YUBARI: What's that supposed to mean?

MAJOR: You were a marine once, ma'am.

YUBARI: And you know from my file how that ended. I was supposed to bring that Reman smuggler in for questioning. I lost my cool. I killed him, and lost my first arm in the process.

MAJOR: I never read your file, ma'am. I only had to see you walk, or sit, or smile. You wore marine green, and, in my eyes, you always will. You understand why we can't function in an environment where trash like Lio is allowed to thrive.

YUBARI: I was a marine, Major. Five years ago. Today, I'm an officer of the U.S.S. *Excelsior*, NCC-Two-Thousand-C. So are you. So is Lio, in his way. We all belong to this ship first, our departments second. Remember it.

MAJOR: Ma'am, yes, ma'am.

YUBARI: Dismissed.

MAJOR: Ma'am?

YUBARI: Yes, Major.

MAJOR: A Reman smuggler — that wasn't the San Francisco ring, ma'am. Was it?

YUBARI: It was.

MAJOR: I heard stories, ma'am.

YUBARI: You would have. Earth's worst crime wave in three centuries, its first drug craze in two? The War left us more vulnerable than we realized, in more ways than we knew.

MAJOR: Then you were there the night of the takedown. You were in Operation Zefram.

YUBARI: Major, I was Operation Zefram.

MAJOR: Did they retaliate, ma'am? Against your family, I mean? Some of my men who were in Zefram —

YUBARI: Dismissed, Major.

SCENE 405-06**LOCATION: SICKBAY**

(A biobed hums in the background as medical diagnostics are run.)

SHARP: Maiek, look at this brainwave scan!

MAIEK: Does it explain the coma, Doctor?

SHARP: All the fear centers in Jack's brain are still active. Now, this is just a guess, but [I think it's possible the coma is psychosomatic!]

(The *Excelsior* shudders. At the same instant, all the power systems spike for several seconds before returning to normal levels. A bit more than last time.)

MAIEK: What happened to the power?

SHARP: Sickbay to bridge? Sickbay to [bridge.]

Interrupted again.

(The BRILLIANT, VIOLENTLY SPARKING BLUE ORB suddenly appears, rotating in midair. "Coker's Interlude" returns.)

NURSE HENNESSY: Doctor, what is that!?

SHARP: Security! Security to sickbay! Maiek, try to scan that thing!

MAIEK: (screams) NO, STAY BACK! I WON'T GO! I'LL DIE FIRST!

SHARP: Maiek, what's going on?!

MAIEK: THEY'RE WAITING FOR US IN THE CENTER! CAN'T YOU SEE?

(Maiek lunges for the instrument tray, knocking several instruments – and the tray itself – to the floor. But he still grabs a laser scalpel.)

SHARP: Maiek, give me that laser scalpel!

(The laser scalpel activates, humming.)

MAIEK: NO, FATHER! I AM DEAD TO ROMULUS, AND I AM DEAD TO YOU!

SHARP: Drop it, Maiek!

(He slashes his wrists with the laser scalpel, which crackles! He screams in pain and collapses.)

(The orb vanishes, as abruptly as before!)

(Sharp runs to Maiek.)

SHARP: Maiek! Both wrists are slashed. He's losing blood much too fast! Mike! Help me get him on a biobed!

(Nurse Hennessy walks over.)

HENNESSY: Yes, Melissa!

(They lift up Maiek and put him on an open biobed, which immediately activates – critical condition!)

SHARP: Forceshield the wrists, Mike! Somebody get me a hundred cc's antivasokin!

HENNESSY: I haven't used that much coagulant since the War!

SHARP: Maiek's a good doctor; he knows how to make himself bleed. Thanks, Aidela.
(she injects the hypospray Aidela just handed her) Vitals are stabilizing. What was he saying, right before he tried to kill himself?

HENNESSY: I don't know. Something about Romulus and his father.

SHARP: His father is Romulan. And they don't have a good relationship. Let me check something...
(she runs a scan) The fear centers. They're all still active. (pause) It's the same coma.

SCENE 405-07**LOCATION: CONFERENCE ROOM**

DOVAN: People, I only want one thing from this briefing: explanations. Yubari, the orb. What is it? Where is it?

YUBARI: I don't have an explanation yet, captain.

DOVAN: Melissa, the coma. How do we cure it?

SHARP: I've confirmed it's closely related to activity in the fear centers of the brain. Jack and Maiek are literally so scared right now they're unable to operate the rest of their brains. Jack needs respiration support just to keep breathing. But... a real explanation? We're still a long way from that. It looks a little bit like the coma from the Wasting, and I've studied that for over a year now with no results.

DOVAN: Neeva, the alien ship we're trying to rescue. Tell me anything.

NEEVA: I don't have anything, sir. The center of the Star Fountain is a blank — it's like the sensors go blind looking at it.

DOVAN: Okay, last chance. Rol, J'naya, the power fluctuations. Just before the orb appears on the ship, we've lost power for a few seconds. And it's getting worse.

J'NAYA: The warp core's in rough shape, sir, and the shields are shaky. The effect seems to be exponential. But as for what's causing it... We have no clue, sir.

LORHROK: Captain, if I may make a recommendation?

DOVAN: If I'm not getting any explanations, I may as well take recommendations. Go ahead, Alecz.

LORHROK: We should consider retreat, sir.

DOVAN: To the edge of the Star Fountain?

ROL: It's unlikely the alien ship would survive long enough for a second attempt.

LORHROK: I know that. And I don't like it, Captain.

NEEVA: But we won't save the aliens by getting ourselves killed the exact same way.

DOVAN: I take it you're agreeing with the X.O., Commander?

NEEVA: I am.

DOVAN: Those people are going to die without our help.

SHARP: There are eight hundred living people on this ship, sir, who may not be if we hold our course.

DOVAN: But they'll die.

ROL: Perhaps we should put it to a vote, captain.

J'NAYA: I'll accept whatever the majority decides.

DOVAN: What? No. No! This is not a democracy! What's gotten into you all of a sudden? We're exploring a new frontier, finding out what we can and bringing the needy back alive. I know it's a little risky, but this ship doesn't abandon a cry for help until Alecz's quarters get blown to pieces.

LORHROK: Oh, too soon, sir.

DOVAN: Sometimes, not even then. Oh, Gevinon was months ago, Alecz; get over it.

YUBARI: Yeah, I thought this was the Federation's most honored starship, not some cut-rate Orion pleasure cruiser.

NEEVA: Respectfully, lieutenant, are you calling us all cowards?

(Tense silence.)

DOVAN: Maybe... maybe she'd be right to. Melissa, please run a bioscan on yourself.

SHARP: Alcar?

DOVAN: Do it, Doctor. Focus on the fear centers of your brain.

(Sharp pulls out a medical tricorder and scans herself.)

SHARP: Oh, no.

ROL: What is it?

SHARP: My amygdala is showing signs of a highly elevated fear response. I thought I was just a bit tense, but, according to this, I'm scared out of my wits. And so are the rest of you.

NEEVA: Whatever's affecting the comatose crewmen...

SHARP: Is setting up shop in our heads, too.

YUBARI: Why aren't I affected?

SHARP: According to this, you are.

YUBARI: Then shouldn't I be cowering with the rest of you?

SHARP: I don't know, Asuka. Maybe you're just too hardcore for the rest of us.

LORHROK: Nobody's cowering here. But our decision-making is impaired — all of us, whether we voted to retreat or not.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: We're going to rescue that ship. Anyone who disagrees with this decision is ordered to take a break, get some lunch, relax for an hour. You've all been working hard, and nothing fortifies the heart like a full stomach. Dismissed.

SCENE 405-08**LOCATION: BRIG**

(The forcefield makes a forcefield noise as Mudd hits it again.)

HERTZLER: Mister Mudd, no matter how many hours you bang on that forcefield, I'm not going to talk to you. (pause) And, no, I can't read lips. Now would you let me work on this requisition?

(Three bangs on the forcefield.)

HERTZLER: Shut up, Mudd! Or are you going to make me come in there [and MAKE you be quiet!]

(Power fluctuates again, this time quite deeply and for several seconds.)

HERTZLER: ...the hell is happening to the power?!

(The brig forcefield drops.)

MUDD: Ah, there we are.

HERTZLER: Security to the brig! Forcefield is down; prisoner insecure!

(Hertzler whips out and charges his phaser.)

MUDD: My good man! I'm not going to make a break for it. I simply wanted to share a little information.

HERTZLER: Then share it!

MUDD: Ah, but, you see, in exchange, I want safe passage off this ship. I have the awful feeling that, if I stay in the Star Fountain, I'm going to die.

(Pause.)

HERTZLER: Well? Talk!

MUDD: Nayjeb Prime.

HERTZLER: What about it? It's a nice planet. Some friends live there.

MUDD: Oh, dear jailer — Garman, wasn't it? — I'm afraid they don't.

HERTZLER: That's ridiculous. I got a letter from T'Kel right before we left Starbase.

MUDD: I'm sorry, Garman, but this is the truth, and it's not going to be easy to hear.

(Hertzler raises the power setting on his phaser.)

HERTZLER: Security backup, where are you?! You're on very thin ice, Mudd.

MUDD: Nayjeb Prime is where Starfleet Intelligence "retires" you if you die under embarrassing circumstances. All its records, its inhabitants — all fake. Including Lieutenant Asuka's [AH-ska's] brother.

HERTZLER: I don't believe you.

MUDD: Of course you don't; I just told you your commander's a liar and your friends are dead, why would you? But if you'll take me to my ship, I can prove what I'm telling you.

DOVAN: *Dovan to brig.*

HERTZLER: (hitting his combadge) Brig! Captain, all respect, but I have a loose prisoner and where's my backup?

DOVAN: *That's what I'm calling about. They were delayed by the blue orb. It reappeared right after the power went, and it's heading your way. Try to [hold on for a few more minutes.]*

HERTZLER: Captain? The comm just went [dead.]

(The BRILLIANT, VIOLENTLY SPARKING BLUE ORB suddenly passes through the brig doors (which open for it). "Coker's Interlude" again, still ethereal.)

MUDD: Jailer?! Jailer! It's coming after me!

HERTZLER: I know!

MUDD: Do something!

(Hertzler shoots it with his phaser. Sustained beam.)

HERTZLER: Phasers do nothing! MUDD!

MUDD: AHHHH! I HAVE TO GET OUT! I HAVE TO GET OUUUUUUUT!

(As he screams, he charges straight at Hertzler whose shot goes wild. Mudd decks him with a loud blow to the chin.)

HERTZLER: Ooof!

(As he hits the ground, Mudd scoops up his phaser (which he charges) and the orb vanishes, as abruptly as before.)

(The brig door opens.)

RANDOM CREW #405-01: Security backup! Get on the floor!

RANDOM CREW #405-02: Mister Hertzler! He's down!

MUDD: NEVERRRR!

(He shoot them both. The cry out as they collapse.)

MUDD: You think you can stop me, you Gorn monsters?! I have to get my sister out of here. I'M COMING, STELLA!

(He runs toward the brig door where he just shot those guards exits to the corridor.)

SCENE 405-09**LOCATION: DELTA LOUNGE**

LORHROK: The strange part is I don't feel that different. I can tell from the way I'm acting that I'm as scared as I've ever been. But it's going straight past my consciousness, right into my spine. I don't know; maybe I should be relieved of duty.

ROL: Why?

LORHROK: I can't control this. I voted to let those people die, Bev. What scares me most is that I might do it again.

ROL: You think the captain's immune to the fear field? That I am?

LORHROK: You're both handling it better than me.

ROL: (chuckles) I think running headlong into danger might be the captain's natural response to fear.

LORHROK: And you?

ROL: I have my principles. The aliens're in trouble. We're the Federation.

LORHROK: I have principles.

ROL: Do you?

LORHROK: How can you ask that?

ROL: Alecz, you said some very pretty things to me back when I needed to hear them. But it was easy for you to say them then. Now, when I watch you, it seems like you always just do what feels right.

LORHROK: What do you have against doing the right thing?

(The doors open.)

ROL: Doing what feels right is a lot better than doing what feels good, but it's a long way from doing the right thing. You can't trust feelings, Alecz.

(Footsteps begin approaching.)

LORHROK: I survived Gevinon because I trusted my feelings.

ROL: Did you?

LORHROK: Trust my feelings?

ROL: Survive Gevinon.

LORHROK: That question doesn't even [make sense.]

(Yubari arrives.)

YUBARI: Hey.

LORHROK: Leftenant! You startled me.

YUBARI: Am I... interrupting anything?

ROL: People only ask that when they know the answer is "yes."

LORHROK: But you clearly didn't mean anything by it. Care to join us?

YUBARI: Can't. Have either of you seen Lio?

ROL: Around the corner, by the Dom-Jot tables.

YUBARI: Thanks.

(She begins to step away.)

LORHROK: He's grumpy.

YUBARI: He's always grumpy. Lio!

LIO: Whatcha need, Lieutenant?

YUBARI: Talk.

LIO: Talk to the synthehol. I'm not a counselor.

YUBARI: Not about me, Lio. I hear you have a problem with the marines. Tell me.

LIO: What's to say? You militarize a ship of peace, its missions stop being so peaceful. You train people to shoot real good and leave diplomacy to the higher-ups, it's no surprise when there's a lot less talking and a lot more bodies. It's not the marines' fault; they're good men who are very good at what they do. They just don't have any business aboard the *Excelsior*. We've seen what happens, to us and them, when they are.

YUBARI: You have the right to believe whatever you want, Lio, but, as a member of a starship crew, can't you see — (The doors open) Oh, what now?

(Mudd barges in, firing several shots into the ceiling. Yelling and screaming from many of the patrons of the Delta Lounge, including Lio.)

(Yubari begins immediately walking toward Mudd.)

MUDD: PLEASE LIE DOWN ON THE GROUND! I don't want to be uncivilized, not even to you Gorn vermin.

YUBARI: Mudd.

MUDD: You are all my hostages now! Free my sister and give me my ship! I won't let you kill us at the center of the Star Fountain!

YUBARI: Mudd!

MUDD: My angel! Where's my sister? Don't take another step or I'll OOF!

(Yubari punches him in the face, grabs his phaser, and shuts it off.)

YUBARI: You're disarmed, Mudd. And you're delusional. Surrender.

MUDD: I will not surrender 'til you've drawn the last drop of blood from OOF!

(Yubari punches him again, he falls over, unconscious.)

YUBARI: Now you're unconscious, Mudd. Yubari to Medical and Security. Emergency in the Delta Lounge.

HERTZLER: *Security here. Lieutenant, we were just going to inform you[: Mudd's escaped his cell!]*

YUBARI: That Mister Mudd escaped? A little late, Ensign. Doctor Sharp, be advised that Mudd seems to be in the same coma as the other victims. Yubari out.

LIO: Lieutenant, I think I owe you a drink.

YUBARI: Lio, forget what I said.

LIO: About what?

YUBARI: About you having a right to your opinion. Did Mudd come in here guns blazing because we "militarized" the *Excelsior*?

LIO: Well, no, but...

YUBARI: No, he came in here because space is dangerous. We didn't make it dangerous, and the only place where protecting yourself magically makes the galaxy more dangerous is in bad science fiction.

LIO: I never said we shouldn't protect ourselves! We have security! You just saved my life — it didn't take a marine.

YUBARI: Lio, do you know what security school I graduated from?

LIO: ...New Tokyo on Mars?

YUBARI: Wrong. Titan.

LIO: There's no security school on Titan.

YUBARI: Titan Marine Ranger Academy, class of seventy-seven. Ooo. Rah. (pause) You will apologize to Mister Willis and never speak of this again where any member of the crew might hear. No, Lio, I don't want to hear it. You owe me your life now. This is getting off easy.

(Pause.)

LIO: Okay.

YUBARI: Good! I'll have that drink to go.

SCENE 405-10**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

NEEVA: The orb attacks are getting more frequent the closer we get to the center of the Star Fountain, and the power drains are getting worse. If we go all the way in, I'm not sure we'll be able to get back out again.

DOVAN: Commander, the decision's been made.

NEEVA: Just making sure you have all the facts, sir. That's my job, sir.

SHARP: Well, it's not mine, captain. Can't you feel what's at the center of this white hole?

DOVAN: I know what my guts are telling me, but I trust my eyes a lot more. The only thing at the center of this phenomenon is a crippled alien spaceship that needs our help – plus possibly the Iconian planet we need to find if we're gonna save the entire galaxy from annihilation. Anything else is just bad vibes.

SHARP: It's more than that, and you know it.

(The bridge door opens at that moment and Yubari steps out of the turbolift.)

YUBARI: Captain.

DOVAN: Lieutenant? Your progress?

YUBARI: When Mister Mudd attacked us in the Delta Lounge, he was raving about the Gorn.

NEEVA: Everyone who touches the orb starts saying gibberish.

YUBARI: It's not gibberish. I read his file: twenty years ago, Mudd and his sister were sentenced to death by the Gorn Hegemony. Mudd escaped. His sister didn't.

DOVAN: So Mudd was reliving something that really happened to him.

YUBARI: The worst thing that ever happened to him.

NEEVA: Meyers.

SHARP: What about Jack Meyers?

NEEVA: During the battle of Gevinon, he was trapped in a storage unit with three other engineers while the bluegills tried to swarm in. Jack was the only survivor.

DOVAN: That's why he was screaming about "them" "getting in."

SHARP: What about the music?

NEEVA: What music?

SHARP: When the orb appears. The music it's playing.

YUBARI: There... isn't any music, Melissa.

(Sharp hums "Coker's Interlude".)

DOVAN: I've had that song stuck in my head all day. Just can't remember where I heard it.

NEEVA: Me, too!

SHARP: Well I never heard it until the orb appeared. You really didn't notice it playing?

YUBARI: The orb can mess with our heads. Who knows what we really heard?

NEEVA: Whether or not it came from the orb, it must mean something that we've all been hearing it.

(Dovan hums the next few bars.)

NEEVA: Uncanny.

SHARP: But why?

DOVAN: No idea.

(A major power fluctuation.)

DOVAN: ...but I suspect someone is about to get a much better idea. Senior officers to the bridge!
Engineering, epicenter of that power fluctuation!

J'NAYA: *Main bridge, sir!*

SHARP: One of us, even.

(The orb appears. Ethereal Coker again.)

SHARP: There! Can you hear the music?

NEEVA: No! There's no music!

YUBARI: It's going to keep moving until it touches one of us!

DOVAN: Me! Let it take me!

YUBARI: You're the captain! The ship needs you! I'll go!

DOVAN: No, Yubari!

YUBARI: It'll take me to the day my brother died! I can handle it!

DOVAN: I thought your brother retired!

YUBARI: I lied!

NEEVA: You better decide quick; it's getting very close!

YUBARI: I'm deciding for us! Rescue those aliens, sir!

DOVAN: LIEUTENANT [YUBARI]!

(But Yubari has just touched the orb, and there's a flash...)

SCENE 405-11**LOCATION: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO – NIGHT (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

BRAHMS: You all know what we're up against tonight. They call it a smuggling ring, but these Remans are more like a death cult, and the Ketracel-White they sell is their sacrament. (pause)
Tonight, Charlie Company, you are my exorcists!

YUBARI + MARINES: Oorah!

BRAHMS: Captain Yubari!

YUBARI: Sir!

BRAHMS: Everything hinges on your company's retrieval of the informant, whoever it is.

YUBARI: We have the location, we have the countersign: we don't need to know who the informant is. He just needs to name the kingpin.

BRAHMS: Once the informant identifies the kingpin, Alpha Company takes the kingpin alive, and the entire ring collapses. The rest of the battallion will keep [their pickets distracted and confused, allowing a clean infiltration.]

YUBARI: With respect, General... I know the mission. And you don't have to worry about my personal feelings. I won't let them interfere.

BRAHMS: Soldier, this smuggling ring killed your parents. When the informant tells us who the kingpin is, you'll have your first chance for justice. I want your personal feelings to interfere.

YUBARI: Yes, General.

BRAHMS: And, Captain?

YUBARI: Sir?

BRAHMS: You know this is a memory, don't you?

YUBARI: Stardate five-seven-five-five-five. Worst day of my life.

BRAHMS: You might think it'll be easier, knowing what's going to happen next. You're wrong. It's worse. There's only one escape for you: get out of the Star Fountain. SQUAD! Dismissed!

SCENE 405-12**LOCATION: DESERTED BEACH (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

YUBARI: What? Where is this? Another memory?

BEZU: Asuka. ["Ahska"]

YUBARI: Bezu. This is Sato Beach, near my old house.

BEZU: Our old house.

YUBARI: I must be, what, nine, ten years old?

BEZU: Eight, stupid. Now come play with me.

YUBARI: I don't wanna play with you, Bezu. Remember what happened last time?

BEZU: Come on, Asuka. All I want to do is bury you a little. You won't even have to move. It'll be fun!

YUBARI: I wanna play in the water.

BEZU: How about you play with me, or I'll tell mom you were fighting with your brother again.

YUBARI: And I'll call you a liar.

BEZU: You know, little sister, that I'll have the bruises to prove it. And mom will never believe I gave them to myself. You'll get grounded. Again. Come on, just play with me!

(Pause.)

YUBARI: It won't be like last time?

BEZU: Not at all! Look, I already dug the hole for you to stand in!

BRAHMS: Having to say the exact same words, walk the exact same steps, even knowing what's coming? The agony must be exquisite.

YUBARI: I think deep down I always knew what was coming.

BRAHMS: We'll return to this later. Let's get back to San Francisco.

SCENE 405-13**LOCATION: SAN FRANCISCO (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

THE MAJOR: Captain! Get down, ma'am!

YUBARI: (as she dives to the ground to get out of the line of fire) Whoa!

(Three shots pass just overhead.)

THE MAJOR: Returning fire! (he takes some shots with his phaser) Captain, are you alright, ma'am?

YUBARI: Major?!

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, Second Lieutenant Ryan Willis, ma'am. Can you walk? We're almost to the informant, ma'am.

YUBARI: Lieutenant? You were on this mission? But earlier...

BRAHMS: The Major lied. Operation Zefram left him with his own demons to exorcise. You met a lot of marines that night; you forgot he was one of them.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am?

YUBARI: Never mind. Of course I can walk. I wasn't even hit, no thanks to your shouting.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, sorry, ma'am.

YUBARI: And I like you better once you stop saying "ma'am" all the time.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am?

YUBARI: Never mind. How many are there?

THE MAJOR: Three, ma'am. Well-trained, well-fortified.

YUBARI: So if we try to break through to the informant together, we'll get mowed down.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, yes, ma'am.

YUBARI: Really, you need to stop saying that. Cover me.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, you'll be torn to shreds out there if [you try to run for it, ma'am!]

YUBARI: By the end of the night, Major, I'll have my arm blown off and a giant metal plate in my leg. But right now? I'm a frakking ballerina of death. I'll never shoot or run this well again, but by God I will get to the informant.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, yes ma'am!

YUBARI: Now!

(She runs out from behind cover as bad guys shoot at her, the Major returning fire as possible.)

SCENE 405-14**LOCATION: DESERTED BEACH (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

(We hear a shovel collecting sand and throwing it on a pile.)

YUBARI: Bezu, I'm up to my neck now. You can stop. I'm buried. You buried me.

BEZU: Do you know what I heard once, sister?

YUBARI: Bezu, let me out.

BEZU: I heard that there's a moment.

YUBARI: Bezu, stop! It's getting in my mouth!

BEZU: A moment, just before someone dies, when you can look into their eyes and see their soul.

BRAHMS: Was this the greatest betrayal of your life, Lieutenant?

YUBARI: (starts to cough) Bezu, stop! STOP!

BRAHMS: ...or was this?

SCENE 405-15**LOCATION: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO – NIGHT - PLAZA (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

(She takes a couple steps forward on the asphalt ground, then taps her commbadge.)

YUBARI: Blossom to Damocles. I've reached the rendezvous. Three Remans dead at the entrance; looks like our informant had to fight his way here. Giving the sign. Damocles, come in. Nothing. Jammed. (she takes another step forward) I love all waste and solitary places. (pause) I love all waste and solitary –

BEZU: Asuka [AH-ska]?

(Asuka spins and draws her phaser.)

YUBARI: Hands up! Counter-sign!

BEZU: Asuka-san! It's me!

YUBARI: Bezu? You're the informant?

BEZU: Five years, Asuka, you don't write, you don't call...

YUBARI: I was expecting an actual Reman. Why wasn't I told you were infiltrating them?

BEZU: Your superiors think I was killed two years ago in a swordfight on Corsava Four. Brahms didn't tell you?

YUBARI: Two years is more than enough time to re-establish contact.

BEZU: That would really miss the point, Asuka-san, since I was faking my own death.

YUBARI: Of course you did. Starfleet tries to turn you into a decent human being, and you'll do anything to escape. Fine: the General can sort it out after the extraction. This way.

BEZU: Ask me for the countersign.

YUBARI: What?

BEZU: You never made me give the countersign. How do you know who I am?

YUBARI: Bezu, there'll be more Remans on the way! We have no more time for games!

BEZU: Ask me!

YUBARI: Fine! Sign! "I love all waste and solitary places!" Countersign!

BEZU: I don't know.

YUBARI: Countersign, Bezu!

BEZU: I tell you, I've no idea! I'll bet that dead Reman just inside the door did. He was the informant, after all.

YUBARI: But... but if he was the informant...

BEZU: Uh-oh, sister. Haven't you been wondering why the Remans killed Mother and Father? Two more harmless people you could hardly have imagined, with their music and their gardening. Yet they were executed like common gangland snitches.

YUBARI: I assumed that was a reprisal – for something you'd done.

BEZU: In a sense, yes. They died because they had learned who I was — because they'd heard the name... Prince Bezu of Remus.

YUBARI: You're the kingpin.

BEZU: They tried to turn me in. I had no choice, Asuka-san. Just as I have no choice now.

(He draws his sword.)

YUBARI: Don't move! I'll shoot! Set to kill!

BEZU: There's a Romulan suppression field around this entire plaza. Your phaser, communicator — useless.

(Yubari tries to fire! And the phaser makes a sad noise as it fails.)

YUBARI: Dammit!

(Bezu steps forward.)

BEZU: Do you remember the beach, Asuka-san? All those years ago?

YUBARI: Bezu, no, don't —

(Bezu swings his sword, and it separates Yubari's arm from her body. Yubari screams.)

BEZU: You didn't need your right arm, did you? If you'd like to stop a moment to collect it, feel free.

(Yubari breaks into a run — away from Bezu!)

YUBARI: Blossom to Damocles! Damocles!

BEZU: Running so soon? No, sister, I want to see your eyes this time.

(He chases after her.)

YUBARI: Yubari to Brahms! Please!

BEZU: We'll just have to sever your hamstring.

(The sword swings again, taking a big chunk of flesh just above Yubari's knee. Yubari tumbles to the ground painfully, screaming.)

BRAHMS: There it is, Lieutenant. The moment you know you're about to die. Only this isn't the first time you've known that.

SCENE 405-16**LOCATION: DESERTED BEACH (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

(Yubari is choking and gasping. She's suffocating.)

YUBARI: Bezu, Bezu, I can't breathe!

BEZU: It's close now. So close.

BRAHMS: Your vision is blurring, your brain shutting down, only the pain is left. This is the moment when you break: when you run screaming from the Star Fountain and no one can stop you.

BEZU: Let go, sister. Let me see your eyes.

BRAHMS: And still... you aren't really afraid, are you?

YUBARI: Not... yet.

SCENE 405-17**LOCATION: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO – NIGHT - PLAZA (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

(Bezu sloooooowly walks up to stand right over Yubari.)

BEZU: I'm sorry, sister. Isaac should never have sent you.

YUBARI: Bezu – agh! – you never killed me before. All those times you tried.

BEZU: You had our parents to protect you. No longer. Now, turn and face your end. It's the honorable thing, and somehow that always mattered to you, didn't it? Despite your best efforts.

YUBARI: Bezu...

BEZU: I said face me, Asuka!

YUBARI: ...there's something you should know. Come closer.

BEZU: Fine: I'll turn your head myself.

(He reaches down to roughly turn her head to face him.)

YUBARI: You didn't get the whole hamstring. HiYAAA!

(Yubari kicks Bezu in a very vulnerable spot!)

BEZU: Aagh! (groaning) Oh...

YUBARI: Now your ARM!

(She kicks again, now in the wrist, and the sword spins out of his hand and clatters to the ground, some meters away.)

BEZU: My sword!

(He lunges for it.)

YUBARI: Not... so FAST!

(The sword clatters as Bezu tries to pick it up but Yubari rolls into him and he loses his grip.)

(Yubari punches Bezu.)

(Very, very quickly, Bezu punches back.)

(Yubari gets to the sword and rolls onto it.)

BEZU: Give it back!

YUBARI: Say "please".

(She grabs the sword off the ground, swings wildly through the air, slashes Bezu, then slams it back into the ground.)

BEZU: My neck! (he collapses to the ground) Ooof!

(Yubari takes the sword again, then stands up, groaningly.)

YUBARI: You'll live. Probably. If you get medical attention.

BEZU: I don't under... understand.

YUBARI: You lost, Bezu! I'm not just your tortured little sister anymore, and Mom and Dad can't protect you out here!

BEZU: Protect me?

YUBARI: It took a million Reman troops to replace them, but you're nothing alone. You never were! How does it feel?

BEZU: Feel?

YUBARI: To have a sword pointed at your own throat for once, you monster?

BEZU: Is that how you see this little slip-up?

YUBARI: Bezu, if you answer one more question with a question, I'll [slit your throat.]

BEZU: No you won't. (pause) Something you never understood, sister – and listen closely, it's why I was always able to bully you, why you never rose as far as I – it's not about who's holding the sword, it never is; the power of generals and princes, of life and death, always goes to the one who has leverage. Leverage is how I brought Praetor Shinzon to power. Leverage is how I survived his fall. (pause) Your marine squad can't be two minutes away. You just captured me. I have intelligence your section needs – information about the Sword of Damocles from my underworld contacts. I've lost today, granted, but I don't need my army: Isaac Brahms is protecting me now. (pause) Leverage, Ahska. If you could get your temper under control for one minute you'd finally see that.

SCENE 405-18**LOCATION: BEACH (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

(Yubari still drowning in sand.)

YUBARI: Be... zu.

BRAHMS: The beach again. Strange. Why are we here?

BEZU: I said, let go, Ahska. Let go! (pause) Huh. Fine. I guess I'll have to let you live.

(He removes some of the sand. Yubari has huge, gulping gasps of air!)

BEZU: Hi, mom! Hi, dad! Yeah, we were just playing! I'll dig her out in time for dinner! They're home early. I thought I'd have longer to dangle you over the precipice there, make you think you were dead. (pause) Maybe next time.

BRAHMS: You want to call him a monster. You want to kill him. But somewhere, deep down, part of you is grateful he let you breathe again.

SCENE 405-19**LOCATION: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO – NIGHT - PLAZA (YUBARI'S MEMORY)**

YUBARI: Leverage, you said.

BEZU: Don't despise it just because it's keeping me alive. It's kept you alive for decades.

YUBARI: You're an evil creature, Bezu.

BEZU: "Evil" is a silly word for it, but thank you. And: well done. I can see your temper coming under control.

YUBARI: You were right. I'm beginning to see things clearly. Calmly.

BEZU: Congratulations. This is just the first step, but - (Yubari slashes his throat wide open) Ahhhg!

YUBARI: Just bandage it with some leverage, Bezu.

BEZU: (gurgling) Asuka... (dies)

(Silence.)

BRAHMS: I've never seen that look on your face before, Yubari.

(She drops the sword.)

YUBARI: I did it again. I tried so hard this time... and I still did it.

BRAHMS: Your report said he died because you lost your cool in the heat of a battle.

YUBARI: He died because... I don't know.

BRAHMS: Don't know? Or can't say?

YUBARI: Yes.

BRAHMS: And now you're afraid.

YUBARI: More than I've ever been.

BRAHMS: So get out of the Star Fountain! Run away, as fast as you can!

YUBARI: You can't run away from yourself, General. No matter how much you want to. Do you know what I saw in his eyes?

BRAHMS: What?

YUBARI: Nothing.

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: We need to talk.

YUBARI: I'm gushing blood, down a limb, going into shock. I don't have time.

BRAHMS: Then the Beacon will slow the memory. We'll have a little longer before you lapse into unconsciousness.

YUBARI: But you still won't do a thing for the pain, will you? (pause) What are you?

BRAHMS: The Iconians laid the Beacon one million years ago, as a warning. It drains ship's power, compels its crew – anything to keep them away from the center of what you call the Star Fountain.

YUBARI: Why? Is this where the Iconians keep their buried treasure?

BRAHMS: You mean Avalon? No – Avalon can never be found, except by she who holds the Mapstone. The Star Fountain contains only the Beast.

YUBARI: A beast?

BRAHMS: The Beast. The Beast lured you into the Star Fountain, offering you your heart's desire. There is no distress call, no alien ship, no Avalon at the center. There is only the Beast, imprisoned in the white hole, and its illusions. It will consume you. You must get out.

YUBARI: You couldn't have just told us that?

BRAHMS: The Beacon needs to last as long as the Beast – 70 million years. Language may no longer translate, but fear always will. So the Beacon was programmed for fear.

YUBARI: Didn't work on us.

BRAHMS: The *Excelsior* is the first ship to penetrate this far into the anomaly in almost seven centuries. Very few sapients thrive on fear, as you do. A trait I've always admired in you, Miss Yubari, but which today may prove your undoing.

YUBARI: It got me past your stupid fear program. Ohhh...

(We start to hear a non-ethereal "Coker's Interlude".)

(Yubari falls to her knees and drops the sword.)

BRAHMS: Asuka!

YUBARI: Just... blood loss. Not sure it's the arm or the leg that's worse. Can't your Beacon do anything for the pain?

BRAHMS: It already is. More than ninety percent of the pain encoded in your memory is being blocked. Otherwise you'd be hallucinating.

YUBARI: Says the dead man I'm talking to.

BRAHMS: We don't have much time, Lieutenant. You have to get away from the Beast. When you wake up, you'll have about ten seconds. Execute an emergency warp reverse. It's your only chance. It may already be too late; the Beast has not fed for centuries, and it is desperate.

YUBARI: Wait. I can hear the music. The music that's been in our heads.

BRAHMS: You perceive it as music. Very interesting.

YUBARI: It was you! What does it mean?

(Brahms slowly fades away.)

BRAHMS: If all else fails, we've given you the tools you need to defeat the Beast.

YUBARI: But what about the music?

BRAHMS: I said, we've given you the tools you need! You're almost gone - there's no time to [explain more!]

SCENE 405-20**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

DOVAN: --YUBARI!

YUBARI: Captain, you need to execute an emergency warp reverse – right now.

(The turbolift opens, and Lorhrok and Rol step out.)

LORHROK: Reporting as [ordered, sir.]

DOVAN: Alecz, Bev – the orb just got Yubari. Step back before she attacks.

YUBARI: Captain, the Beacon didn't "get" me. I defeated its programming. I'm not hallucinating, I'm fully aware of my surroundings, and you need to trust me: this is a trap. We need to lock the warp engines into an emergency reverse, before it's too late.

NEEVA: Penetrating the inner boundary now, sir.

YUBARI: Lieutenant Lorhrok, please – you told me to ask questions. Well, I've been asking questions, and now I have the answers, from the Iconians themselves. Emergency reverse now or we're all dead!

LORHROK: I think she's alright, Captain.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I think you might be right. Helm, lock in the warp engines and [engage emergency reverse!]

(The Helm beeps an alert.)

ROL: Sir, I just lost helm control.

LORHROK: What? Why?

ROL: Some kind of tractor beam. Power output's off the scale!

(Ops alert.)

NEEVA: The *Excelsior* has penetrated the inner boundary. We are now in visual range of the white hole.

DOVAN: On screen!

ROL: That's no alien starship.

BEAST: I WILL DEVOUR YOUR SOULS! YOUR HOPES AND AMBITIONS WILL STRENGTHEN ME AND I WILL FEED ON YOUR VERY LIVES!

YUBARI: There is no alien starship; there never was. It's The Beast.

LORHROK: That... thing created the orb?

YUBARI: No! The Beast was imprisoned here by the Iconians. It tried to lure us in with its distress call. The orb was an Iconian Beacon, intended to ward us off.

DOVAN: Which I furiously ignored. Damn. Hailing frequencies!

YUBARI: Open.

DOVAN: This is the Federation Starship *Excelsior*. We are on a peaceful mission of peace and... peacefulness!

BEAST: "PEACE! PEACE!" THEY CRY, WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE!

ROL: It can read our thoughts.

YUBARI: That's how it lured us in here. A distress call and Avalon? How could we resist?

DOVAN: The *Excelsior* is a Starfleet dreadnought equipped with an advanced arsenal! Release us, or we will be forced to defend ourselves!

BEAST: THEN DEFEND YOURSELF, FOR I. SHALL. FEEEEED!

ROL: Engines are overwhelmed. We're being pulled forward!

NEEVA: Into the white hole?

ROL: No: into that thing's mouth.

DOVAN: Lieutenant Yubari. Quantum torpedoes, full spread.

YUBARI: Full spread, aye.

(She fires.)

LORHROK: Captain, I don't feel the fear anymore.

YUBARI: We're beyond the reach of the Beacon. It can't affect us.

SHARP: You mean scare us.

DOVAN: Or save us.

ROL: Torpedo impact!

(A bunch of torpedoes hit shields)

(Damage readouts appear at Rol's console)

ROL: The Beast doesn't appear to be injured. No effect.

NEEVA: Wait... that isn't completely accurate. The torpedoes struck some kind of multiplexing energy field around the Beast, which absorbed their impact.

LORHROK: Like a deflector shield.

NEEVA: It's more layered than that – different shields protecting different parts, and the whole thing is rotating –flickering - eighty thousand times per second. Our first torpedo did serious damage to one of the Beast's shields, but our second torpedo hit a different shield, our third torpedo hit a third shield... we couldn't cut through with a thousand torpedoes like this.

LORHROK: Can we target just one of the shields, focus our fire there, and punch through?

NEEVA: There seem to be more than a million total shields, shifting constantly, flickering on and off. It's breathtaking, really. Our computers can't see enough of a pattern to lock on to just one. If we could...

ROL: I don't like to rush, sirs, but distance is five million kilometers and closing.

DOVAN: Neeva, take your best guess and feed it to tactical. Yubari, precision phaser strikes, as soon as you have the solution.

NEEVA: Sir, [I don't think I can get this by feel.]

DOVAN: Commander, we don't have time to crack the code; we barely have time for a guess. I trust you. Do it.

NEEVA: Yes, sir.

(Neeva inputs a best-guess firing solution.)

YUBARI: Solution received. Firing all phasers!

(A series of phaser strikes in rapid, rhythmic succession.)

LORHROK: Report!

NEEVA: Damn it! Even less effect than the last volley, sir. I need more time.

BEAST: (an evil, scary, maniacal laugh — nearly a scream...) FEED! FEEEEEEED!

ROL: Two million kilometers!

DOVAN: Engineering, we need more power!

J'NAYA: *We'll try'n find her second wind, sir!*

ROL: One point five!

(The Beast laughs again.)

YUBARI: The tools we need to defeat The Beast.

LORHROK: Leftenant?

YUBARI: The tools we need to defeat The Beast! What if Brahms wasn't ignoring my question... what if he was answering it?

DOVAN: Brahms? Brahms is dead. Doctor [Sharp, check if she's hallucinating.]

("Coker's Interlude" fades in.)

YUBARI: No, wait! Switching phaser solution to manual!

YUBARI: Opening fire!

(She starts firing to the music.)

BEAST: NO. ACCEPT YOUR FATES.

DOVAN: If we were that sort we wouldn't be in here in the first place. Neeva?

NEEVA: It's working. Lieutenant Yubari has found the pattern. She's breaking through.

YUBARI: Quiet, please.

(She keeps firing to the music.)

BEAST: NO. NOOO!

NEEVA: We're through!

YUBARI: I can't stop. Need to keep the hole open.

LORHROK: Rol, secondary access - load quantum torpedoes!

ROL: Loaded!

DOVAN: FIRE!

(Shots are fired. Torpedo explodes.)

BEAST: THE PAIN! THE PAIN!

LORHROK: Warp engines online!

DOVAN: Emergency reverse, hit it!

LOCATION: SPACE

(Excelsior leaps to warp, very quickly.)

(A black hole erupts out of the explosion, expanding and growing to massive size.)

(The black and white holes destabilize each other in a horrible ying-yang matter-antimatter explosion.)

BEAST: PAAAAAAAAAAAAAIN!

(The *Excelsior* warps past the expanding explosion at lightspeed.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

ROL: We're clear of the shockwave!

NEEVA: The Beast is destabilizing the white hole! I've never seen anything like it!

DOVAN: Any threat to us?

NEEVA: I don't think it's going to be a threat to anyone for a few hundred years, Captain.

DOVAN: Well, that was certainly a[n... adventure.]

(The Beacon appears as it usually does, except this time with no ethereal musical backdrop.)

ROL: The orb!

LORHROK: It's back!

DOVAN: Not again!

NEEVA: Lieutenant, look out!

(The orb touches Yubari. Flash!)

SCENE 405-21**LOCATION: BRAHMS'S GARDEN**

BRAHMS: Asuka.

YUBARI: Beacon. This isn't San Francisco.

BRAHMS: No need for bad memories now. This is a good one. One of mine. I hoped to see you one last time before you leave the Star Fountain.

YUBARI: Why?

BRAHMS: Well, for one, I owe you an apology. I have for a long time now. What I did to you in San Francisco...

YUBARI: I never blamed the General. But he's dead; stop pretending you're him. I don't need an apology from a fragment of my own subconscious some Beacon is mindreading back at me.

BRAHMS: And you're not going to get one. Tell Mister Rol it's time he apologized for us both.

YUBARI: Rol? He wasn't at Operation Zefram.

BRAHMS: No, he wasn't. But he knows what we did. And, when you see him, tell him my asphodels are blooming; he'll understand. Now, I understand you're looking for Avalon. The Scion treasure world.

YUBARI: Iconian.

BRAHMS: Same thing. Scionians are what the Iconians became after they left the galaxy. You mean you didn't get that from the spelling?

YUBARI: Fine, Icons, Scions, I don't care. If the bluegills find Avalon, they'll use what they find there to destroy the Milky Way galaxy. We need to get there first — it might give us the first fighting chance against the Sword of Damocles we've ever had.

BRAHMS: Yes, I suppose it might. If you need to find Avalon, then you need to find the Mapstone.

YUBARI: The what?

BRAHMS: An artifact. It is said that Avalon can be found only by a Scion, or by she who holds the Mapstone.

YUBARI: I don't suppose you have a copy.

BRAHMS: There are no copies. Nor do I know its exact location. But I believe you may find it near the edge of the Jathlin Arm. (pause) Oh, dear.

YUBARI: What?

BRAHMS: I wasn't supposed to tell you that. The Beacon's systems are shutting down. You'll be locked out.

YUBARI: The Jathlin Arm is huge. I need more, General.

BRAHMS: I've told you all I know. Tell Dovan, tell Parker — hell, tell Hanas, if she'll listen: the Mapstone. She who finds the Mapstone finds Avalon. And Asuka — I'm proud of you.

SCENE 405-22**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE****LORHROK: Yubari?****YUBARI: The Beacon... deactivated. Captain, I have some information I need to share with you, immediately.****DOVAN: About the Beacon?****YUBARI: No. About Avalon. I might have an idea where it is.****(Pause.)****DOVAN: My ready room. Now.****(They exit.)****NEEVA: Does anyone have any idea what just happened?****ROL: I can't wait to read her report.****NEEVA: Assuming it isn't classified.****LORHROK: I'm sure we'll find out what we need to know in good time. Ensign Rol, set course for Morex, cruising speed.****ROL: Course laid in.**

SHARP: I suppose I'd better get down to sickbay to see if our patients are reviving.

NEEVA: Wouldn't want Mister Mudd to miss his trial!

ROL: Don't give him any ideas!

LORHROK: Engage.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The *Excelsior* jumps to warp.)

SCENE 405-23**LOCATION: DELTA LOUNGE**

LORHROK: So, how do you evaluate your performance on the assignment?

YUBARI: I hate this question. Why pretend my evaluation matters? Yours is the one that does.

LORHROK: The Great Prophet taught that to understand a thing is to change it. How you perceive your own command abilities will make a much bigger difference in the long run than whatever silly number I put down on this little review.

YUBARI: That number determines whether I actually advance toward my promotion.

LORHROK: And if you dodge the question again, Lieutenant, I'm reducing the number by five percent.

YUBARI: Fine. (pause) I tried to find an even-handed solution. I listened to both Mr. Willis and Mr. Lio and looked for the middle ground between them. But I lost my temper. I sided with the Major and nailed the barkeep to the wall. I failed in the assignment you gave me. There. Am I a better commander now that I've saved you having to tell me I failed?

LORHROK: Lieutenant... what was the assignment I gave you?

YUBARI: To resolve the conflict between Marine Country and the Delta Lounge.

LORHROK: And the Major has lifted the ban on marines visiting the Delta Lounge. There's two right now at the tri-D chess table.

YUBARI: I didn't resolve the conflict. I picked a side.

LORHROK: Yes, of course you did. Lio was dead wrong. He's a barkeep; he had absolutely no business even commenting on ship's operations, certainly not criticizing them. You corrected him and made it stick; problem solved. Who said anything about not picking sides?

YUBARI: A good leader doesn't pick sides; a good leader finds a compromise everyone can embrace. Like you said: a leader gives orders others want to follow. That's why I've never been one – and never will be.

LORHROK: With all due respect, Lieutenant, that's a bunch of baktag. A good leader is fair, but all that means is your subordinates get what they deserve, which is exactly what you did. Asking the Major to meet Lio in the middle on this - that would have been an injustice. Ninety-one.

YUBARI: Ninety-what?

LORHROK: Ninety-one. That's your score on this assignment. Keep this up, and you'll make Lieutenant Commander before I do. (sigh) Sadly, that's the end of my lunch break. I need to get to Life Sciences for a meeting about their computer upgrades. You'll excuse me?

YUBARI: Of course, sir. Thank you, sir.

LORHROK: My pleasure.

(Lorhrok stands and exits. Rol almost immediately sidles over and takes a seat.)

ROL: Ma'am?

YUBARI: I was wondering how long you were going to keep lurking over there, Ensign.

ROL: Mind if I finish Alec's cookies?

YUBARI: I want one. The rest are yours.

ROL: Mmm-mmm.

(Rol takes a big bite out of a nice crunchy cookie and chews for a minute.)

ROL: So... (he swallows a bite) I read your report.

YUBARI: Good for you; you want an autograph?

ROL: You saw Isaac.

YUBARI: It wasn't the General. It was just the Beacon, reconstructing him from my own memories.

ROL: I know that's what you said in your report. I was just wondering if you were lying about that, too.

YUBARI: What.

ROL: Quote, "I was then forced to relive the sword fight I had with the Reman kingpin, D'Lex, who had just killed my brother, Bezu, the informant. D'Lex used a Romulan *S'harien* sword to sever my left arm above the elbow, and..." You just reported the same cover story you've been spouting for three years. You never admit to killing Bezu yourself. You never call him the kingpin.

YUBARI: That's what I'm supposed to do; the truth is classified. So how the hell do you know about it?

ROL: It was my fault.

YUBARI: What?

ROL: I owe you an apology, Lieutenant. Have for a long time. (pause) I trained Bezu for his insertion into the Reman smugglers. So did Isaac. We saw what he was on this inside, but we were arrogant. We were Intelligence. We thought we could control him. And we couldn't have been more wrong. He didn't help us get the Remans under control; he took control, and turned against us. (pause) If we had just been willing to admit the truth when we saw it, Bezu never would have amounted to more than a local thug. Your parents would still be alive. You'd still have... well, at least some of your original limbs.

YUBARI: I'd like to say you couldn't have known... but you did, didn't you?

ROL: Isaac always tried to watch out for you after Bezu went bad. He thought there would be poetic justice in you collecting the informant who would bring Bezu's whole organization down; that's why you were on Operation Zefram. He had no idea he was sending you into a trap... but he never forgave himself for it. Which is strange — Isaac forgave himself so often.

YUBARI: Yet he never bothered to actually apologize.

ROL: No. I suppose he didn't.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Did he like flowers, Bev?

ROL: Isaac Brahms? Flowers? No, not that I recall. Why?

YUBARI: The Beacon's version said something to me — something odd. I know it's from my own mind, but I can't make any sense of it. We were in a garden.

ROL: Another of your memories?

YUBARI: No. One of his, he said.

ROL: Describe it for me.

YUBARI: I don't know. Lots of bushes, flowers. A hedge. Looked kinda beat up, honestly. Brahm told me to tell you the asphodels were blooming.

ROL: Asphodels? He said that? Specifically? Asphodels?

YUBARI: Yeah. You look like you just saw a ghost.

ROL: Not me. But somebody did. On Gevinon, I spent time in Isaac's mind — the real Isaac, not a projection. The heart of his mind was a garden.

YUBARI: I don't remember this in your report.

ROL: I never told anyone. The psychic battle we were waging was important; the details of how it looked didn't matter. But we fought the bluegill kings in that very garden. Nearly everything was destroyed — Isaac was on the brink of death. But we managed to save one flower, just one, right in the center of the garden. It was an asphodel.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: That... that doesn't make any sense. The Beacon was reading from my mind, not yours.

ROL: Or maybe it wasn't reading anyone's minds at all. The Jathlin Arm, he said?

YUBARI: Yeah. Near the edge.

ROL: I wonder whether we'll find more than just a Mapstone out there.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The *Excelsior* flies by on impulse, into the black blackness of an uncertain frontier – the Jathlin Arm glittering in the distance.)