

Starship: Excelsior
"Picking up the Pieces."
(Season 4, Episode 1)
by James Heaney

Transcribed by Peter Stine

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

SCENE 401-00 (Recap)

(Everything in this recap has an echoey, dreamlike quality.)

LOCATION: THE GEVINON DRYDOCKS – UNDERWATER (FROM 309-26)

LORHROK: Simon, I don't want you to think you owe me anything. You saved our lives yesterday.

WESTLAKE: And you saved mine. Promise me you'll never doubt that. Promise me.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

NEEVA: Sir, we only have a few seconds!

WESTLAKE: Help!

LORHROK: Simon's been tackled!

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR TURBOLIFT (FROM 302-03)

WESTLAKE: Alecz, I'm terminally ill! I'm not scared of death!

YUBARI: There are scarier things than dying, Westlake.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

LORHROK: Simon's been tackled!

NEEVA: We don't have time! Get him out of there!

LORHROK: I don't have a clear shot!

LOCATION: THE GEVINON DRYDOCKS – UNDERWATER (FROM 309-26)

WESTLAKE: Promise me you'll never doubt that.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

NEEVA: We don't have time! Get him out of there!

LORHROK: I don't have a clear shot!

WESTLAKE: Alec, HELP!

LOCATION: ENGINEERING (FROM 302-06)

WESTLAKE: Just trying to be optimistic.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

NEEVA: Take the shot, Alec!

LOCATION: THE GEVINON DRYDOCKS – UNDERWATER (FROM 309-26)

WESTLAKE: Promise me, Alec.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

LORHROK: Great Prophet guide me.

(He takes the shot.)

WESTLAKE: (screams, dies)

LORHROK: NO! SIMONNNNNNN!

(looping and overlapping)

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

LORHROK: Great Prophet guide me.

WESTLAKE: (screams, dies)

LORHROK: NO! SIMONNNNNNN!

NEEVA: We're outta here! Shields up!

LOCATION: THE GEVINON DRYDOCKS – UNDERWATER (FROM 309-26)

WESTLAKE: Promise me...

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

LORHROK: Great Prophet guide me.

LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM (FROM 307-24)

SIMON: Then... we're stranded out here. Alone.

LORHROK: I'm not going to let us die out here, Simon. (pause) That's a promise.

LOCATION: GEVINON – SPACEPORT BUBBLE – BLUEGILL SHUTTLE (FROM 309-54)

WESTLAKE: (screams, dies)

LORHROK: NO! SIMONNNNNNN!

SCENE 401-01**LOCATION: GEVINON SHUTTLE****LORHROK: (quiet gasp)****NEEVA: Alecz, wake up. (pause) Wake up.****LORHROK: (stirring suddenly) Simon! Where's Simon?****(Pause.)****NEEVA: On your feet, Lorhrok. I need your help with the modulators.****LORHROK: But what about – Oh, Maker. He's dead. I shot Simon.****NEEVA: Alecz, I'm sorry. But this can't wait. If the modulators give out...****LORHROK: Yeah... Yes. Right, of course. What do you need?****NEEVA: Engine status. I can't tell if these bluegill computers are busted or just plain confusing, but I can't make heads or tails of the damage readout. A fix on our position would be a nice bonus.****LORHROK: Just (he stands up with a groan)... just show me where.****(He bangs his head on the ceiling.)****LORHROK: Ow!****NEEVA: Watch that ceiling. It's a tiny ship.****LORHROK: Was it even built for humanoids?****NEEVA: Very flexible humanoids, I guess. Who don't get leg cramps.**

LORHROK: Great.

(He stuffs himself into place.)

LORHROK: Nothing I don't deserve. This image represents the warp core?

NEEVA: As far as I can tell.

(He presses some buttons.)

LORHROK: Well, I'm not sure where we are, but engines are online and pumping out thirty cochranes.

NEEVA: The modulators are only seeing five.

LORHROK: Then it's a relay problem. I don't suppose you found the environmental controls? It's a sauna in here.

NEEVA: Oh, I found them alright. Primary heat dissipators are wrecked. Which means that even if we can fix the warp engines...

LORHROK: Running them at full power will cook us alive. But if we don't run them at full power...

NEEVA: It'll take almost five years to get back to Federation space. Air recirculation is at half-power, too. We won't suffocate... for now.

LORHROK: What about your Orion pheromones? Without recirculators... Are they under control?

NEEVA: Oh, yeah! While you were asleep, I pulled over at a passing starbase and got a pheromone suppression treatment. I'm sorry I forgot to mention it. Or to ask for a new life support system.

LORHROK: Oh, good. Sarcasm. Try again.

NEEVA: You're about to find out that being an Orion woman means a lot more than green skin. We'll both be prone to short tempers, strong feelings, and weak concentration... just what we need right now.

LORHROK: They should only affect me, shouldn't they?

NEEVA: Technically, they do. But my body only starts firing off pheromones when it's in an estrous cycle. And, unfortunately, the old slavers called us "animal women" for very good reason. It's not a relay problem. I checked while you were sleeping.

LORHROK: It has to be a relay problem, Commander.

NEEVA: Oh, are we back to using ranks now?

LORHROK: I'll check your work.

(He steps forward, but Neeva blocks him.)

NEEVA: No. I did my job, sir. Do something useful instead.

LORHROK: Like documenting all the ways this ship's going to kill us? Maker, Neeva, you can't even read the engine status!

(Pause.)

LORHROK: The fact that I want to hit you — that's pheromones, right?

NEEVA: Yeah. Pheromones. The feeling's mutual.

LORHROK: This should be fun.

NEEVA: Shut up, Lorchrok.

SCENE 401-02a**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* cruises by.)

SCENE 401-02**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR SICKBAY – SHARP’S OFFICE**

(Cox comes around the corner into the office.)

COX: Excuse me.

SHARP: Can I help you?

COX: Yes, I’m looking for Brady Winters? She was here in sickbay.

SHARP: She may have been moved to one of the recovery wards after surgery. Let’s see.

(Sharp picks up a padd.)

SHARP: Her name was Brady...

COX: Winters. About five-seven; long, dark hair, looks like she never washes it?

SHARP: Oh, Brady! Lovely woman.

(Sharp scans through the padd.)

SHARP: She is in, um... Oh, no.

COX: What is it?

SHARP: Can I ask you to take a seat, ma’am?

COX: What is it?

SCENE 409-03**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(Dovan presses the door control to Stellar Cartography. The door opens. He enters.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR STELLAR CARTOGRAPHY

(The door closes behind Dovan. He takes a few steps down the catwalk, then notices Captain Cox standing out in the center and stops.)

DOVAN: (clears throat loudly)

COX: Hm? (pause) Oh! Captain Dovan.

DOVAN: Skipper Cox. I didn't expect to find you in Stellar Cartography.

COX: Is that what you call this place? It's incredible. A giant sphere of stars, all around you. I've never seen so many. Until you rescued me and my crew, I never thought I would.

DOVAN: The stars aren't just something to look at; they're an extremely valuable tool. Stellar Cart helps the *Excelsior* chart new sectors, study plasma phenomena... anything you need.

COX: Oh, do you need to study a plasma phenomenon?

DOVAN: No, I came down here to brood, and the stars are something to look at. You?

COX: Yeah, same.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Skipper, you ever heard of James T. Kirk?

COX: I admit we've been out-of-touch, Dovan. But not that out of touch. I grew up on those stories, same as you, from Organia to Johnny Harrison. The first, greatest five-year mission in history.

DOVAN: You know how many people Kirk lost on that five-year mission? Total?

COX: No idea.

DOVAN: Seventy-three. (pause) I've been in command five weeks, and I've tripled that number. This morning I was at six memorials, and I have twelve more before bed.

COX: Look, captain, if you want to compete in the Pain Olympics [you may as well quit right now, 'cause I could fill a book.]

DOVAN: I don't, Skipper. I want to look at the stars.

(Pause.)

COX: What's that?

(We hear a faint, very faint, pulsing, sensor tracking noise.)

DOVAN: What?

COX: Those small white nodes. They're not stars; they're too small, and moving way too fast.

DOVAN: Subspace nodules. Scanner deck picked them up this morning. Normally, we'd stop to investigate — subspace and normal space shouldn't be able to interact without a warp field, except in a few exotic theories. But, with the ship the way it is...

COX: You might want to take a closer look at them, Captain.

DOVAN: It's just an anomaly, Skipper.

COX: Maybe. (pause) When the *Anbar* was out in the Big Empty, there was this race called the Sikaar. Sometimes friends, sometimes not. This week we were on “not” because of a little accident on their Homeship. They fired at us with a form of... subspace torpedo. Followed us for days before we were able to get the Sikaar to call it off. (pause) They looked a lot like these nodules of yours, Captain.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I’m going to have another word with scanner deck. Excuse me.

(He starts to walk away.)

COX: Dovan!

(He stops in his tracks. Silence.)

COX: It’s not fair, is it?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I don’t know what they’re going to do to me back home. Drum me out of the service, throw me in prison – hell, maybe they hand me over to Brahms’s people and shoot me. I don’t care anymore. I just want them to make sure I never set foot on a starship again.

SCENE 401-98 (MAIN CREDITS)

NARRATOR: *Episode 1: "Picking up the Pieces."*

SCENE 401-04**LOCATION: DOCTOR SHARP'S QUARTERS**

(Doorbell chimes.)

SHARP: Come.

(Door opens, Yubari enters.)

YUBARI: Melissa?

SHARP: Asuka! Come in.

(Sharp stands up.)

SHARP: I'm sorry, I know I said at breakfast that I'd have those symphonies I promised you today, but it's been busy and let me just see if I can find them...

YUBARI: It's fine, Melissa. I just thought I'd check. I do have that book of crosswords for you, though.

(She hands Dr. Sharp a padd.)

SHARP: Oh, thank you. (she scrolls through) These are going to keep me sane until the ship's library is back online.

YUBARI: It's not a problem. My brother Bezu was an absolute fiend for word games, and somehow my grandmother got it into her head that they'd make a perfect birthday present for me, too.

SHARP: Then I owe you a favor. And your grandmother two. Really, let me see if I can find you that music...

YUBARI: Actually, I had something else in mind.

SHARP: Really? I'm game.

YUBARI: Grapevine has it that you've been providing the marines with... what are they calling them?... "after-action personal integration debriefings".

SHARP: After-action personal... Ah! Well, I've been calling them 'counseling sessions', but... yes, the Major's made them mandatory for the entire detachment, himself included. You want me to extend the offer to Security division, too?

YUBARI: Yes, I do. Everyone's talking about the marine assault on Gevinon, but the fight my security teams put up when the *Excelsior* was invaded wasn't any less heroic – or any less bloody.

(Sharp starts fiddling with another padd.)

SHARP: I'll start scheduling appointments immediately.

YUBARI: How immediately?

SHARP: Why? Is there someone in Security who needs urgent, ah, debriefing?

YUBARI: Yes. (pause) Me.

(Pause.)

SHARP: General Brahms's death.

YUBARI: Yes. No. I'm... there's not anything wrong with me, Doctor.

SHARP: Of course not! Why don't you have a seat? You knew the general for a long time, didn't you?

(Yubari takes a seat.)

YUBARI: He saved my life.

SHARP: And you weren't able to save his.

YUBARI: We all knew it was a suicide mission, Melissa. The surprise was that any of us came back, not that some of us didn't. I was lucky.

SHARP: And how does that make you feel?

YUBARI: Really?

SHARP: Well, if you want to conduct this debriefing yourself, you can ask whatever questions you want. Until then... how did it make you feel to outlive Isaac Brahms?

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Well, I think it should feel bittersweet. Brahms betrayed his uniform, his oath, and all the principles they stood for. More than that, he betrayed me. And after what he did to Rol, I would have killed him myself. In the end, Captain Cortez proved him wrong about everything important anyway! I don't mean to sound callous, but Brahms deserved what he got. It's sad to see a great man pass away, but it's good to see justice served.

(Pause.)

SHARP: And?

YUBARI: And what?

SHARP: You didn't answer the question.

YUBARI: Weren't you listening?

SHARP: Yes. You said that's how it should feel. Is that how you feel right now, Asuka?

(Pause.)

YUBARI: I feel like I'm bleeding to death, Melissa.

(Pause.)

SHARP: Do you think, eventually, if he'd survived... do you think you might have forgiven him?

YUBARI: Forgive him? I can hardly think of anything more... heinous. The only people who have any right to forgive Isaac Brahms will never have that chance. So, no, he shouldn't ever be forgiven. Not by us. Not by the living.

SHARP: That's another "should" answer, Asuka. But it's not what I asked. Do you think you might one day have forgiven him?

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Melissa... I already had.

SCENE 401-05**LOCATION: GEVINON SHUTTLE**

(Blip blip blip... something's on the radar!)

NEEVA: Got you!

(Ping. It vanishes from sensors.)

NEEVA: No, not again.

LORHROK: How's that life support coming, Neeva?

NEEVA: I'm not working on life support. I'm trying to get midrange sensors back up – but the resolution won't stay put.

LORHROK: Midrange sensors? Neeva, we don't need midrange sensors. We need life support.

NEEVA: Life support's a losing game right now, Alecz. We have to put down somewhere if we want any hope of getting home with oxygen in our bloodstreams.

LORHROK: We don't have time for this. Look, Neeva, all the intelligence data we captured from the bluegills is sitting in this computer core, and the computer core is falling apart. I'm already having to cannibalize parts of the data store just to keep the air we have going. Every second that we're out here, the Federation's chance of surviving shrinks.

NEEVA: There's a planet out there, Lieutenant. Habitable. Just barely. And if I can get a fix on it...

LORHROK: I don't care if it's Elysium. We are not diverting. Simon died to get this intel off the ground. I am not – I am not letting it go to waste.

NEEVA: We need a command decision here, Lorhrok, not a guilt parade.

LORHROK: You don't think this is a command decision?

NEEVA: Am I supposed to be impressed with your command performance so far?

LORHROK: You're still alive.

NEEVA: Simon isn't!

(Pause.)

NEEVA: I'm... I'm sorry, sir. That was [way over the line.]

LORHROK: No, Neeva, it's what you really think.

NEEVA: No, it's [really not, sir.]

LORHROK: You're not the only one.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Sir, Simon didn't die to get that intelligence back home. He died to get us back home.

LORHROK: I know. It just... feels like he's still hanging on. And every megabyte of that data that we lose... (pause) Find that damn planet, Commander. However long it takes, however much intel is left... we're getting home alive.

SCENE 401-06**LOCATION: FIGHTER COCKPIT**

(Dovan and Rol making a pass over the *Excelsior* in the *Patroclus*.)

DOVAN: Whoa, hang on there. Cutting throttle.

ROL: You're breaking formation.

DOVAN: Signal the rest of the patrol to slow. What are those things on the hull?

ROL: Where?

DOVAN: Like, there, just astern of the Deck Three lateral sensor array. Like a big, black, burnt-out blister.

ROL: That's one of the external holo-emitters, captain. Or it was. It's been shot up pretty bad. Condition far beyond repair.

DOVAN: Jehosephat. And that's what they all are?

ROL: Yes, sir. About a dozen left. Adow's teams have already removed the worst ones.

DOVAN: Hard to believe. But it helps explain why we're three weeks out of the dark-matter nebula and still have to fly combat air patrols to get any long-range sensor data. (pause) Alright. Resuming flight pattern. When's our next pass of the *Excelsior*?

ROL: Three minutes, twelve seconds, lower port quadrant.

DOVAN: Anything I should be looking out for?

ROL: The cracked warp nacelle is pretty spectacular, but the damage is mostly superficial. Watch for the hull breaches instead. The fires you'll notice are from the EPS mains that were

cut during the battle. They're the reason Ensign Adow can't maintain warp speed for more than an hour at a time.

DOVAN: Fires? But they're exposed to hard vacuum.

ROL: Plasma fires, sir.

DOVAN: Ah.

ROL: Run a battery of scans on your way past. We found two survivors that way the other day. We might get lucky again. Vesant, you're approaching apogee. Adjust azimuth seven degrees and engage long-range sensors.

VESANT: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: You have to wonder whether it was all worth it.

ROL: We didn't have a choice. If we hadn't fought at Gevinon, our whole civilization would have been wiped out, us along with it.

DOVAN: And that's all we got out of this, isn't it? Survival. No other benefit. A hundred fifty crewmembers dead and an entire planet exterminated just to maintain the *status quo ante bellum*.

ROL: That's why we're here, isn't it? To protect the Federation?

DOVAN: No. Not me. I thought we were explorers.

ROL: We are.

DOVAN: Really. And in your twenty-odd years of service, how many new planets have you charted? How many first contacts have you witnessed? How much actual exploring have you done?

ROL: That wasn't my path. The Intelligence division protects what we have so that Exploratory can freely execute its mission.

DOVAN: I've been in Exploratory my entire career, Rol, and I haven't had the opportunity to execute that mission the entire time. I've never seen a first contact. I've never walked on an uncharted world. I've spent twenty years fighting wars or recovering from them. You failed. We failed. And here's the result: a wrecked ship, a decimated crew, and survival.

(Pause.)

ROL: You're not going to face court-martial, are you? You're going to resign.

DOVAN: I'm not afraid of a trial, Mister Rol. I could survive that, too, if I wanted... win my case. But winning for the sake of winning... It's not really winning at all. And if they're going to send me to die out here in the dead of night a hundred thousand light-years from home, I want to know that I died for something. Something lasting, something decent.

ROL: Something like the Federation.

DOVAN: Odd hearing that from you, Rol. Just last month you were telling Lorhrok an elaborate story about how those Intelligence friends of yours had brainwashed you and turned you into General Brahms's killing machine.

ROL: You didn't believe it?

DOVAN: Seemed a little convenient.

ROL: It was. (adjusting his instruments) All pilots, scans are clear for this quadrant. Proceed to next patrol area.

SYLVESTE: *Coming about to bearing two-one-seven.*

DOVAN: Two good people died. You're going to tell me you were powerless to stop yourself from killing them?

ROL: No, I'm not. Lieutenant Lorhrok was naïve to believe everything I suggested to him.

DOVAN: So you did murder them.

ROL: Yes, sir, I did. But I did it, of my own free will. Not Alec Lorhrok's Federation. Not Tryla Scott's Federation. Not my Federation. Me. I made a mistake.

DOVAN: Bantha poodoo. The only difference I can see between us and the Dominion right now is the breathlessness of our self-justification. Your Federation turned a blind eye for as long as it thought it needed you in order to survive.

ROL: Maybe. But now I'm going home, my work is done, and my barbarity has been exposed. There's a full confession on my desk ready to transmit to Admiral Parker, and I think I'd be arrested whether I surrendered or not. We're no Dominion, sir. That's just cynicism masquerading as self-righteousness.

DOVAN: Hm. (pause) Yeah, I guess it is. Sorry.

ROL: For what it's worth, Captain... I wish I'd had the wisdom to resign ten years ago.

DOVAN: For what it's worth, Rol[, I do, too.]

(A loud sensor alert.)

DOVAN: Hang on. I've got something on short-range!

ROL: How'd it get past us?

VESANT: *Patroclus, something just dropped in two meters from my cockpit! Near-collision!*

DOVAN: Coming about!

(The fighter swings around.)

DOVAN: Jehosephat.

ROL: I've got it on sensors — barely — but I don't see anything!

DOVAN: You can't see that? That's the biggest glowing sphere of octarine I've ever seen!

ROL: That explains it. Humans can't see in that spectrum. Put us between it and the *Excelsior* and report anything interesting.

DOVAN: Way ahead of you, Rol.

ROL: Vasant! Take your wing and box it in! Sylveste — defensive formation along this heading. Don't let anything else through.

DOVAN: Notify Yubari.

ROL: The *Excelsior* was apprised automatically.

DOVAN: It's a subspace nodule, isn't it?

ROL: Yes, sir! What's it doing?

DOVAN: Trying to get around us, for one. I'm matching course and speed. Do we have weapons?

ROL: Nothing that can tear a hole in subspace.

SYLVESTE: *Patroclus, two more nodes! They appeared behind us! We can't maneuver!*

DOVAN: Rol, this one's starting to pulse!

ROL: All birds, hit the nest! Race 'em in! Captain!

DOVAN: On it! (flips a switch) Summit LSO, Fighter One-One-Six/Excelsior, request priority approach, calling the ball!

ROL: Rol to Underwood. Bringing the captain home.

DOVAN: Go to warp the moment we're all aboard!

UNDERWOOD: *Aye, sir, captain!*

SCENE 401-07**LOCATION: GEVINON SHUTTLE**

(Neeva is panting, then she collapses to the floor, dropping the tools she was using.)

LORHROK: Neeva? Neeva!

(He scurries over to where she has fallen prone.)

NEEVA: (panting)It's too hot.

LORHROK: I know. It's past forty centigrade. Any luck stablizing the temperature?

NEEVA: Um... no. I'm barely keeping breathable air in this compartment.

LORHROK: If we don't reach the planet soon, we'll be dead of heatstroke long before we run out of oxygen.

NEEVA: If I can't keep the air scrubbers going, you'll succumb to my pheromones and we'll die rutting like animals on the floor long before we reach the planet.

LORHROK: Here.

(Lorhrok crawls over to her.)

NEEVA: You shouldn't be this close to me, sir.

LORHROK: I have to be in order to give you this water.

NEEVA: What... where?

LORHROK: I've been trying to coax the replicator into condensing it a drop at a time out of the air. This is what we've got so far.

NEEVA: I can't take all that.

LORHROK: It's barely an ounce.

NEEVA: And it's all we have, isn't it?

LORHROK: I'll be fine.

NEEVA: Alec[, you could die.]

LORHROK: That's an order, Neeva. Drink up.

(He holds a pouch of water up to her lips, and she sips from it weakly.)

LORHROK: Slowly.

NEEVA: Mmmm-hm. (panting again) It's not enough.

LORHROK: I know.

NEEVA: Let me help you with the replicator.

LORHROK: No! (pause) With all due respect, Neeva, I need to be as far away from you as possible right now.

NEEVA: We need the water.

LORHROK: Exactly. Keep working on the engines. Trust me, Neeva, I'm terrible at relationships. Ask my last girlfriend.

NEEVA: Sir, whatever happens to you here is pheromones, not a relationship.

LORHROK: That's not how it works for me, Commander. I almost wish...

(A tractor beam locks onto the shuttle. A couple of alarms go off.)

NEEVA: What's that?

LORHROK: Tractor beam!

NEEVA: Where from?

LORHROK: No idea. We don't have short-range sensors.

NEEVA: The bluegills?

LORHROK: Probably.

NEEVA: What do we do?

LORHROK: What can we do? Nothing. We keep running the distress call. If they contact us, we bluff. If they board us, we self-destruct. Until then? We stay alive. (pause) Two glasses of ice-cold water, coming up.

SCENE 401-08**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

UNDERWOOD: Time to intercept, Ms. Yubari.

YUBARI: Three minutes, eight seconds.

UNDERWOOD: Engineering, anything more you can give us would be very much appreciated.

(Turbolift doors open. Rol and Dovan enter the bridge and begin moving toward their stations.)

ADOW: *You're lucky to have what you've got, Bridge.*

DOVAN: Understood, Ensign Adow. Thank you for your efforts. Underwood, report.

UNDERWOOD: You have a clearer idea than I do. They're right on our tail.

DOVAN: And we can barely keep our engines at warp five. They're going to catch us.

UNDERWOOD: Where did they come from? Last report from stellar cartography had these three with the main herd, more than ten hours away.

DOVAN: I wish I could tell you. I was tempted to blame our long-range sensor array, but I saw it myself. They weren't there, and then they were.

(A Sensor alert.)

YUBARI: The lead node is firing some kind of nucleonic pulse!

DOVAN: Dangerous?

YUBARI: Unknown! Impact in two... one... mark!

(The ship shakes and the shields are hit.)

ROL: All decks report no damage.

YUBARI: Shields are down twelve percent! Sir — it's an energy drain!

UNDERWOOD: And once our shields are down...

DOVAN: Assuming they're torpedoes, I think we know what happens nLOCATION: Yubari, lock phasers.

UNDERWOOD: Dovan, phasers won't interact with subspace. They'll pass right through.

DOVAN: I know. But they're all I've got. Yubari!

(Another sensor alert.)

ROL: Sir! They're breaking off! Dropping to warp two and adjusting course to rejoin their formation.

UNDERWOOD: Deciding we're not worth the effort?

DOVAN: Or going back for reinforcements? I don't know. Maintain yellow alert, Rol. Yubari, find me a weapon that works on these... things. (pause) I'm so sick of this. (he stands.) Underwood, you have the bridge.

UNDERWOOD: Are you sure, Dovan? We'll be at Starbase sooner than you think.

DOVAN: I know. And you'd better break in that chair before we get there. Otherwise, I can't guarantee that First Officer Yubari won't try to take it from you by assassination.

YUBARI: You know, you both think you're being quiet, but I can hear you.

ROL: Me too.

DOVAN: Mm. I'll be in my ready room.

(Dovan exits to his ready room.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR READY ROOM

(He moves quickly toward his desk.)

DOVAN: Computer, why's it so cold in here?

COMPUTER: *Temperature set by direct command.*

(Dovan sits.)

DOVAN: It's freezing. Who's first on the docket?

COMPUTER: *Harkless, Crewman Allan R. Updated status K.I.A. Next of kin: Ensign Timura Harkless, assigned U.S.S. Crazy Horse, brother; Roberta Harkless, mother; Timurakhan, father.*

DOVAN: What medals have I applied him for?

COMPUTER: *Application for the Christopher Pike Medal of Valor is pending submission.*

DOVAN: Uh-huh. Open a new letter. Address it to his parents. Standard template, today's stardate, leave the details open for me.

(The computer complies.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Computer.

(The computer acknowledges.)

(Silence.)

DOVAN: Lower the ambient temperature another five degrees.

SCENE 401-09**LOCATION: GEVINON SHUTTLE**

(Still in a tractor beam.)

LORHROK: Okay... I'm going to run it again. With any luck... this time at least we'll find out why the temperature controls are still offline.

NEEVA: Alecz.

LORHROK: I can't worry about the tractor beam until we're sure this shuttle won't cook us.

(He flips a big switch and an internal diagnostic starts.)

NEEVA: Alecz.

LORHROK: Neeva?

NEEVA: I've stopped sweating.

LORHROK: Is that normal... for Orions?

NEEVA: It's heatstroke, Alecz.

LORHROK: I know.

NEEVA: I'm shivering. It's warming me up even faster. I need... I need... Oh, son of a Borg.
(she shivers badly)

LORHROK: Neeva?

NEEVA: Chlorodiazepine. They've gotta have some... somewhere.

LORHROK: I'll check.

(He opens a wall panel and starts looking through the medical supplies stored there.)

NEEVA: I know you tried to keep your promise, Alecz.

LORHROK: My... promise?

NEEVA: That we'd get home... alive.

LORHROK: Oh... that promise. (pause) Someone might still pick up our distress call. Rescue us from the bluegills before we get wherever they're going.

NEEVA: The distress call we're sending out is holographic.

LORHROK: Holographic communicators were all we had left after the bombardment.

NEEVA: I know as well as you do that holographic signals... degrade at long range. No one will ever hear us except the bluegills. And who knows what they want with us?

LORHROK: I wonder if we'll live long enough to find out. (pause) Chlorodiazepine?

NEEVA: Yeah. It will... stabilize me, bring my core temperature down for the next hour or... two. (she shivers again.)

LORHROK: Got it.

(He crawls across the shuttlecraft to her, then injects her with it.)

NEEVA: Ohhh... thank you. That's much better.

LORHROK: I'm glad. (pause) I... should go back. Your beauty is... [starting to overwhelm me.]

(The computer completes its diagnostic.)

NEEVA: Wha... what is that?

LORHROK: It's my diagnostic. My last set of changes... Neeva, they worked. We have temperature control!

NEEVA: What? Lower by ten degrees centigrade.

LORHROK: Ten? Let's try twenty!

(A whoosh of cold air.)

NEEVA: Ahhhhhh!

LORHROK: Feels wonderful.

NEEVA: I could kiss you, Alec Lohrok.

LORHROK: Don't let me stop you!

NEEVA: Well, I guess you earned it. Just one. Don't get greedy.

LORHROK: Never, Neeva. (as he gives her a short kiss on the lips) Mmmm.

(They kiss, then pull away.)

NEEVA: Oh, my. That... that may have been a mistake.

LORHROK: Maybe. I'm not... sure. We'd better... better try again.

NEEVA: I don't... think... Alec, this is pheromones.

LORHROK: Yes, it is. But I think I'm in love.

NEEVA: Alec, it might feel like love...

LORHROK: Then it is love.

NEEVA: It's not you.

LORHROK: In this moment? In this place? Yes it is. And I can't change that, so take me as I am, or don't. What do you want from me, O beautiful lady?

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Alex, please... Please kiss me one more time.

SCENE 401-10**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* cruises by.)

DOVAN: *Personal Log. Some starship commanders consider it their duty to give a eulogy at every memorial service. I am not one of them. A captain remains as distant from his crew in death as he must in life. (pause) Yet there are a few, difficult exceptions.*

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR ASSEMBLY HALL

(Dovan walks down the central aisle to his front-row seat.)

DOVAN: Melissa.

SHARP: Alcar.

DOVAN: Is his Final Message ready to go?

SHARP: Yes. Right after you're finished, Alecz will show up in the holographic ring just in front of the podium. He'll say whatever it is he was recorded to say. Then we cue the music – his will asked for Trill percussion, I did my best – then final commitment.

DOVAN: Commitment? We don't have a body. What are we putting in the torpedo?

SHARP: Nothing. You should mention that in your remarks. (pause) I heard you're resigning.

DOVAN: Seems like everyone's heard. (pause) Yes, it's true. I'm only retaining command long enough to get these heroes home.

SHARP: Ah.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: "Ah"? That's it?

SHARP: Did you expect something else?

DOVAN: Well... to be honest, Melissa, I expected you to try to talk me out of it.

SHARP: Hmph! You'd like that, wouldn't you? (pause) No, Alcar, I'm grateful you're resigning. I really like something about this ship, and I wasn't looking forward to requesting a transfer off it.

DOVAN: I don't follow.

SHARP: Don't you? You won the Battle of Gevinon by using a biological weapon of mass destruction, which you deliberately lied to me about, and you don't "follow" the reason I can't serve under you anymore.

DOVAN: I did lie to you, Melissa, but I can't apologize for it. If I'd told you about our plan to use the Wasting, you would have become responsible for it. I couldn't allow that.

SHARP: Oh, sure, very noble, Alcar. Except you know perfectly well that if you'd told me about your plan to use the Wasting, I would have stopped you. That's what you couldn't "allow."

(Pause.)

DOVAN: You're right: we would all be dead, along with the rest of the Federation. Again... I can't apologize.

SHARP: Oh, so a just society can go to any lengths to defend itself?

DOVAN: I've heard that line before. Who said that?

SHARP: Someone very much like you, Alcar Dovan.

(Underwood approaches.)

UNDERWOOD: *Dovan? They're ready.*

DOVAN: *I'm sorry I'm going to have to cut this short, Melissa. At any rate... I'm glad the *Excelsior* will still have you, after I'm gone.*

(He rises and steps forward to the podium.)

DOVAN: *Alec Lohrok was... (pause.) Alec Lohrok had... (pause) History has... has a flair... (long pause) No... no, I can't. (pause) History has a flair for the dramatic. We remember a narrow canon of carefully curated no, to hell with the speech. (the padd is discarded; long pause) Alec Lohrok was the only person on my command team – hell, maybe the only one on this ship – who still loved his Starfleet uniform. (pause) I know you all think you do. There are days when I think I love it, too. At least... used to be. I was wrong. Hollow. That love, it was... (pause) A long time ago, there was a war in Bolarus. They called it the Philosopher's War. It was about... wasting Bolian lives, like they all are. When the Nominalists and the Realists finished murdering each other, though, they built a monument to their remorse. A great library – largest in the world. It was a symbol – not just a beautiful building, but an idea. A hope. It drew us together. The Bolian people fell in love with the Library. Our symbol. (pause) Centuries passed; things changed. The Library became a fortress – a capital city. Their ruler put the Library on her coat-of-arms and sent thousands of men into battle for the Library. And they were happy to die for the Library. They thought they loved it. But, really, they'd killed it. And the saddest thing of all is that they didn't know it. (long pause) Nobody told Alec Lohrok that Starfleet was dead. He wouldn't have believed it if we'd tried. I guess that makes him an idiot. But you need idiots like Alec Lohrok. Or otherwise you...*

(A holographic image of Lohrok appears just in front of Dovan.)

LORHROK: *My name is Lieutenant Alec Lohrok of the late Federation Starship *Excelsior*. To any and all ships capable of receiving this signal: I and the only known survivor, Lieutenant Commander Neeva, have escaped in a shuttle. Power is minimal. Life support is failing.*

DOVAN: *Ensign Adow, please deactivate Lieutenant Lohrok's final message until we're ready.*

ADOW: *Captain... this isn't Lohrok's last message.*

DOVAN: Then what...?

SHARP: A distress call!

DOVAN: Jehosephat. Adow, get to engineering! We need top warp speed as soon as we have a fix on their signal! Who knows how long their life support will hold? (pause) That's not a question, Science department, that's an order! Mister Ro'ta, get me timecodes and survivability projections! I am fresh out of eulogies for my first officer! Bridge, this is the Captain: I need [a holographic signal triangulated and I need it now!]

LORHROK: (in background) *We've set course for a planet a light-year away, but, realistically... Please, if you receive this message, whoever you are: find us. Help us. We're not going to make it on our own. Message repeats.*

UNDERWOOD: Action Stations! Action Stations! All hands to condition red! Captain Dovan to the Bridge! Repeat: all hands to action stations!

(Red alert klaxons go off.)

DOVAN

Dovan to Underwood: explain yourself!

UNDERWOOD: Captain, our subspace torpedo stalkers have just come back. And they brought friends. We're under attack.

(The ship shakes and the shields are hit. Twice, in rapid succession)

SCENE 401-11**LOCATION: *EXCELSIOR* BRIDGE**

(Dovan exits turbolift and heads for the center seat.)

UNDERWOOD: Captain on the Bridge!

(The ship shakes and the shields are hit, twice, in rapid succession.)

DOVAN: Yubari, shield status.

YUBARI: Falling steadily. We were able to harden them against the nucleonic pulses, but not completely. And they're firing a lot more of them.

(Three pulses, in rapid succession.)

DOVAN: And as soon as our shields drop, we'll be vulnerable to warheads. (sigh) Lorhrok was a better tactician than I am. Underwood, what have you got?

UNDERWOOD: We think we have a weapon, Dovan. Engineering is calling it an inversion. It's a short-range isolytic burst that tears apart subspace where it hits.

DOVAN: Sounds promising. But it's an isolytic weapon. Commander Underwood, as our diplomatic officer, I am required to formally ask you: Does this weapon comply with the terms of the Anti-Isolytic Deployment Treaty?

UNDERWOOD: Captain Dovan, as your diplomatic officer, I formally reply: due to the prevailing state of emergency, I have been unable to ascertain this weapon's treaty status.

(Five pulses.)

DOVAN: Good enough for Parker - Hell, he can only hang me once anyway. This weapon'll work, right?

UNDERWOOD: Those torpedoes will be torn apart.

DOVAN: Then by all means, fire at will. Yubari!

YUBARI: We've given the order, sir, but Engineering needs time to power it up.

DOVAN: How long?

YUBARI: They said they'd be ready two minutes from now.

(Underwood checks his console.)

UNDERWOOD: Unfortunately, Dovan, our shields only have sixty seconds left.

(Seven pulses.)

DOVAN: Well, whoever they are, they sure know how to build a torpedo. Rol, transfer everything you can spare to reinforce shields. Leave some juice to fly us out of here, it if comes to that.

ROL: Sir, I'm not sure I can stay ahead of them.

DOVAN: I'm aware of that. But it might be our only option in about forty seconds.

(Eleven pulses.)

YUBARI: Sir, shields are beginning to fluctuate.

DOVAN: We need more time.

UNDERWOOD: Bridge to Engineering. We need more shield power, Ensign, and we don't care where it comes from.

ADOW: *You can have shields or a weapon, Bridge: pick one!*

DOVAN: We'll take the weapon, Ensign. Thank you.

UNDERWOOD: Yubari, prepare a firing solution. Implement the moment the inversion is ready.

DOVAN: Underwood, find a way to disrupt those nodes, or torpedoes, or whatever the hell they are. Buy Adow the time she needs.

(Thirteen pulses.)

UNDERWOOD: I'm not much of an astrophysicist, Dovan.

DOVAN: Those waves feel like they're firing in some kind of pattern. Figure out what it is. I don't need a field equation; I just need thirty seconds.

UNDERWOOD: Aye, sir.

YUBARI: Sir, shields collapsing!

(Two pulses.)

DOVAN: Rol, you've taken everything you can?

ROL: Yes, sir! Ninety percent of ship's power is going to shields!

YUBARI: We need more!

DOVAN: I do not intend for this to be my graceful end! Engingeering, I need that inversion now!

ADOW: *We're trying!*

(Three pulses.)

YUBARI: Shields are gone!

ADOW: *Twelve seconds to inversion!*

DOVAN: Mister Rol, take us [to maximum warp!]

UNDERWOOD: Dovan, the pattern! It's two three five seven eleven thirteen, Dovan! Two three five [seven eleven thirteen!]

(Five pulses hereabouts.)

DOVAN: Jehosephat. Engineering! Turn off the inversion! I repeat: cancel the inversion! NOW!

YUBARI: Sir, [what the hell are you doing?]

DOVAN: Mister Rol, transfer all power to navigation screens!

(Seven pulses.)

ROL: Sir, those screens will leave us defenseless against [these torpedo attacks.]

DOVAN: Just do it, Mister!

(The screens go up. The pulses stop.)

DOVAN: Underwood, did we stop the inversion in time?

UNDERWOOD: Yes, Dovan.

DOVAN: (relieved sigh) Thank the Great Bird.

YUBARI: I don't understand, captain.

UNDERWOOD: Do you think they've given up?

DOVAN: If they have, it's our fault. Can you [try anything?]

UNDERWOOD: Yes. Yes, I have a few tricks up my sleeve. But I'm going to need my protocol padds brought up here. Something tells me this could take a while.

DOVAN: Understood. By the book, Underwood. (pause) Mister Rol, thank Engineering for me. For working so hard... then stopping just in time.

ROL: Yes, sir.

(Rol opens a comm channel.)

YUBARI: Captain, what the hell is going on?

DOVAN: Two-three-five-seven-eleven-thirteen. (another relieved exhalation) Two-three-five-seven-eleven-thirteen, Lieutenant.

ROL: (in background) *Rol to Engineering. Ensign Adow and the entire staff: Captain Dovan has asked me to convey his personal gratitude to you all. First, you invented a whole new weapon and brought it online in less than a day. Then you cancelled it on a couple seconds' notice. It'll be in his log – all our logs, I suspect.*

YUBARI: Those are... definitely numbers.

UNDERWOOD: Prime numbers, Leftenant.

DOVAN: Focus, Underwood.

UNDERWOOD: Right ho.

(Underwood turns back to his computer console and keeps on typing.)

YUBARI: Okay, prime numbers. (pause) Oh my God. The first contact protocol.

DOVAN: Exactly. All the way back to the space boomer days, the universal signal of intelligent alien life has been a prime number sequence.

YUBARI: Because prime number sequences don't appear in nature.

DOVAN: Right. Those subspace nodes – they’re not torpedoes. They weren’t attacking us. They’re intelligent creatures, and they were just asking us if we were, too.

(Pause.)

ROL: And we almost killed them.

DOVAN: Almost! They must have been trying to use our shields for some reason.

ROL: It was a sounding board, sir. If they communicate by nucleonic pulses, hitting our shields was the only way to get our attention. I thought the resonance frequencies were a byproduct of the attack. Now I can see... Those resonance frequencies are a form of inflection - language.

DOVAN: Can you adjust the deflector screens to compensate?

ROL: I’m changing the nutation, sir. If they try to make another transmission, we’ll be able to “read” it without losing the deflectors. It’ll pass right through them.

YUBARI: That makes us sitting ducks, Captain.

DOVAN: I’ll make a note in my log. Underwood, you ready?

UNDERWOOD: Just now, Dovan. We have a transmitter, though search me how the translator will handle syntax.

DOVAN: Then we’d better give it something to work with. Transmit at all resonances, in all linguacodes: ‘This is the Federation starship *Excelsior*. We’re happy to meet you.’

(Underwood fiddles with his console.)

UNDERWOOD: Message sent, Dovan.

(Pause.)

(console alert.)

UNDERWOOD: Annnnd... we're receiving a reply. Universal translator locking on.

DOVAN: Lieutenant Yubari, I believe you have my resignation letter queued up in the outbox?

YUBARI: Uh... (she checks) yes, sir, I do. Ready to transmit the moment we're in range of Starbase.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Delete it for me, will you?

YUBARI: Right away, sir.

UNDERWOOD: Dovan, I'm not sure what to make of this message.

DOVAN: Why? What's the translator giving you?

UNDERWOOD: That's the problem. The translator thinks that they're saying something like... "It is not ours." They've said it several times — I think it's important.

DOVAN: Well... you're the diplomat. Ask them what "it" is.

UNDERWOOD: Right.

(He presses some buttons. Then an alert goes off on Rol's console.)

ROL: Sir, two more subspace nodules just appeared off our port bow. They're carrying an object in some kind of tractor beam.

DOVAN: Identify the object.

(Rol scans it.)

ROL: Sir... it's a Gevinon orbital shuttlecraft!

DOVAN: Lifesigns.

ROL: Two! A Trill male and an Orion female! Vitals weak but stable!

DOVAN: Lords of Kobol. Sickbay! Emergency transport! Underwood, thank them for me. You have the Bridge.

UNDERWOOD: Of course.

ROL: Permission to join you, Captain?

(Dovan already moving to the turbolift. Rol rises from his console.)

DOVAN: Granted. Call relief, then meet me down there.

(Turbolift door closes.)

SCENE 309-13**LOCATION: SPACE**

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, Stardate Six-Oh-One-Seven-One-Point-Eight. After spending several days with the subspace lifeforms, we are only a little closer to understanding them. Even their name is untranslatable. Most of the crew is calling them the will-o'-the-wisps - except for astrobiology, which refers to them by a variety of curse words. Nevertheless, let the record show that I have absolute confidence in their peaceful intent, and look forward to the day when our primitive communications evolve into full cultural exchange. However, I've indulged in this first contact for too long. It's time to go home for repairs and send a science vessel back in our place. We are approaching the Iconian Gateway that will take us back to Starbase Nine-One-One, and, while it has been oddly silent, the crew could hardly be more eager for a friendly drydock, base liberties, and shore leave. I am less enthusiastic, knowing all that awaits me is Admiral Parker's court-martial, but I meet it knowing that, today, after all these years, I have finally accomplished something worth dying for.*

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – STRATEGIC OPERATIONS CENTER

MASTERSON: Admiral Parker on deck!

PARKER: At ease. (pause) Thank you all for coming. I hope you've found this Starbase's accommodations reasonable. Commander Masterson, Starfleet status.

MASTERSON: No change, sir. DEFCON Zero still in effect. Union Gateway inactive. The evacuation fleet is on schedule to Delta Vega. No unusual activity at any Starfleet listening post.

SUMPTER: Excuse me, Admiral. Lieutenant Commander Jon Sumpter, Commanding Officer, U.S.S. *Shadow*. I don't know about the listening posts, sir, but the last time I saw Klingon fleets mobilizing this fast, they invaded Cardassia.

(Murmurs of agreement.)

PARKER: Understandable. Anything that comes through the Gateway goes through the Raeyan Sector first. But once they're through with us, we're surrounded on three sides by Klingons and Ferengi. They'll be the next ones hit.

MASTERSON: Hit by what, sir?

PARKER: I'm afraid that information remains on a need-to-know basis, Commander.

KEYES: Hey! Toedegger No-Apologies Keyes, master of the U.S.S. *von Richtofen*. You got us mustered up like you want to invade the Breen Confederacy in winter, but then you talk like we've got no more chance than a swarm of gadflies. That second part's what my crew hears, Parker. And they're already watching the newsvids of their families being evacuated from every planet near side of Coridan. A little explanation'd go a long way toward fleet morale.

SUMPTER: Hear hear, Captain Keyes.

PARKER: I appreciate your forthrightness, captains, and am grateful to your crews for their flexible response to an evolving situation.

KEYES: That's no answer.

PARKER: I'm sorry you feel that way, Captain. Now, I'd like to start going over the evacuation routes for Faltan and Trinity. Is there anyone here from Hawk[eye Island who can help my staff plan for Raeya and Karr?]

(Sensor alert)

MASTERSON: Sir, the Gateway! It's activating!

PARKER: Emergency beam-out! Get these officers back to their ships!

MASTERSON: Aye, sir!

(As she answers, she keys in some rapid commands at the ready and transporters begin grabbing the captains out of the room.)

PARKER: Then meet me in the C.I.C.!

(He exits into another room.)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – COMBAT INFORMATION CENTER

PARKER: All hands, battle stations!

(A klaxon immediately goes off.)

PARKER: Lieutenant Thrall! What's out there?

THRALL: I'm sensing... ..elation, sir. Relief.

PARKER: Relief? Happiness?

THRALL: Yes, sir. And... exhaustion.

PARKER: Understood. Hail the fleet.

(Some buttons are pressed.)

PARKER: All ships, this is Admiral Parker. Charge weapons and prepare to evade incoming fire. Fighter squadrons, deploy a screen around the capital ships. Frigates to the Starbase perimeter. Hold fire until my order.

MASTERSON: Fleet acknowledges, sir.

PARKER: Time to Gateway connection?

MASTERSON: Transit complete in five – four –

PARKER: Fleet standby to fire!

MASTERSON: Three — two — one —

(The Gateway opens!)

PARKER: Report!

MASTERSON: One starship coming through!

PARKER: Just one — I don't see it on visual. Is it Borg?!

MASTERSON: Sir, it's one of ours! Transponder reads... U.S.S. *Excelsior*!

PARKER: All ships, standby! Commander Masterson, that's not possible.

THRALL: The *Excelsior* is hailing, sir.

PARKER: And there's nothing coming in behind them.

MASTERSON: No, sir. Gateway has closed. Manner Station reports no unusual activity.

PARKER: What about cloaked ships?

THRALL: Sir, I'd detect any intelligent lifeforms — even if they're invisible.

MASTERSON: Scans show the *Excelsior* is heavily damaged. Missing substantial interior volumes.

SUMPTER: *Admiral Parker, this is Sumpter. What are your orders?*

KEYES: *Yeah, what'd the 'celsie do to get four hundred Starfleet phaser banks pointed down her throat?*

PARKER: Maintain alert status! Standby!

THRALL: The *Excelsior* is repeating her hail, sir.

MASTERSON: She's also raising shields.

PARKER: Target them.

MASTERSON: What?

PARKER: Target them, then put them on screen! (pause) Now, Commander!

SCENE 401-14**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

UNDERWOOD: [Mister Rol, power warp engines to full] and have an escape vector at the ready.

ROL: Aye, sir.

DOVAN: I need a threat count, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: Task Forces Thirty-Eight and Fifty-Eight deployed symmetrically between the Gate and the planet. Numerous small fighters in screen formation. Frigates puppy-guarding the base. Yards evacuated and undefended.

UNDERWOOD: Two task forces, eh? We took on more at Gevinon and won.

DOVAN: Lieutenant, pick a target. Any target.

UNDERWOOD: Except the *von Richtofen*, Lieutenant. That's Captain Keyes's ship.

DOVAN: Oh, good point. Don't want to be on his bad side.

(Yubari gets a console alert.)

YUBARI: Captain, the starbase is returning our hail.

DOVAN: On screen.

(Screen on.)

DOVAN: This is Alcar Dovan, U.S.S. *Excelsior*. Admiral, I know we parted ways on troubling terms, but I didn't realize I'd brought the entire Third Fleet down on my head, too.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Admiral? (pause) Admiral Parker. (pause) Yubari, are we on mute?

YUBARI: No, sir.

DOVAN: Then check the inputs. Could be the comm array [is still damaged.]

ROL: Admiral Parker! How hangs the sword?

PARKER: By a horsehair, Lieutenant Rol.

ROL: And may it never snap. Four. Four. Two. Four. Seven. One. Four.

(Pause.)

PARKER: Welcome home, *Starship Excelsior*. All ships, stand down red alert and return to patrol formation. Commander Masterson, get me the war room on Earth. I need to talk to the President. Tell her it's about our friend Damocles. Dovan: I expect your report within the hour. Parker out.

(Screen instantly switches off.)

DOVAN: An hour? The man must be joking.

UNDERWOOD: Mine's finished.

ROL: You did have six weeks to write it, sir.

DOVAN: Not the point. And by the way, Mr. Rol: what the hell was all that?

ROL: The Federation still thinks the Sword of Damocles has fallen. After Gevinon, I tried sending the all-clear code, but, by the time our transceiver was repaired, it was too late: the quadrant was evacuated and the Gateway was closed. (pause) Protocol required that Admiral Parker wait for the all-clear, or he was to assume the *Excelsior* had been subverted by the bluegills... and act accordingly.

DOVAN: And one codephrase was enough to cancel all that?

YUBARI: Sir, message from Starbase. Commander Masterson invites us to dock at Berth Thirteen for immediate repair. U.S.S. *Prometheus* and U.S.S. *Ticonderoga* escorting.

UNDERWOOD: Heavy cruisers both! We're damaged, but we're not invalids.

DOVAN: Our normal dock is Berth Nine. Why the move?

YUBARI: No reason given.

ROL: Berth Thirteen is for impoundment. We'll be locked down, cracked open, and searched for any sign of infestation.

DOVAN: Well, that explains the heavy cruisers. Anything less and I'd just as soon make a run for it.

UNDERWOOD: Yes. Admiral Parker's met you, Dovan.

DOVAN: Follow them in, Mister Rol. Submit to all reasonable inspection demands.

UNDERWOOD: You'd better start your report, Dovan.

DOVAN: True. I suppose... you have the bridge, Underwood.

UNDERWOOD: Grab a padd. Work on it from here. You can have it done by nineteen hundred and head down to the marine party.

DOVAN: No, I... I'd better... They're going to need to get used to you now, Underwood. So be good to them. Or I'll come back here and pull an Underwood on you.

UNDERWOOD: Now, that's something I wouldn't wish on anyone, Dovan. I hope... Well, it doesn't matter what I hope. Good luck, at any rate.

DOVAN: It'll do.

(The turbolift doors close and Dovan is gone.)

SCENE 401-14**LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – CONCOURSE**

(Dovan presses a control.)

COMPUTER: *Dovan, Captain Alcar. Admiral Parker will see you now.*

(The door opens and Dovan enters.)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – CONFERENCE ROOM

DOVAN: Umm... computer, lights.

PARKER: Belay that, computer. (pause) Join me at the window, Commander. I prefer starlight and planetshine. We won't need much more for this conversation.

(Dovan walks over.)

DOVAN: It is a beautiful view.

(Pause.)

PARKER: You disobeyed my direct orders.

DOVAN: In a strictly legal sense, I didn't.

PARKER: You stole the *Excelsior*.

DOVAN: If I hadn't, we wouldn't be here.

PARKER: You were lucky.

DOVAN: No, I just made the right call.

(Pause.)

PARKER: Maybe. It's been a long time since I've been able to tell the difference. (pause) This won't take long, Commander. (Parker pulls out a seat for Dovan) Have a seat.

DOVAN: I meant morally, Admiral.

PARKER: I know what you meant. Sit down.

(Dovan sits, Parker rounds the small table and sits.)

DOVAN: With all due respect, Admiral, you're missing two people. And I expected Admiral Tenson.

PARKER: Admiral Tenson is on assignment. What do you mean, missing?

DOVAN: Regulations dictate that no fewer than three command officers shall preside over a court-martial board.

PARKER: Commander, I have you on charges of disobeying a direct order, dereliction of duty, theft of a starship, and, of course, your extermination of all life on Gevinon Prime triggers an automatic Section Eighteen hearing.

DOVAN: Nevertheless, Admiral, I have not – and do not – waive the right to a trial.

PARKER: Fair enough. But the Sword of Damocles is covered under the Starfleet Secrecy Act of 2375, subject only to direct presidential review. In effect, I can dispose of you as I see fit, with or without trial.

DOVAN: I see. (pause) I had hoped the Federation Council had got around to repealing the Dominion War Acts while we were out.

PARKER: Isaac Brahms made sure it will be a frosty day in hell before that ever happens. (pause) I'm not certain you've taken note, but you're quite similar to Mister Brahms,

Commander. You do whatever it is you set out to do, regardless of the cost. You feel free to ignore your superiors – myself included – whenever they get in your way. And you inspire your crew to do the same – despite their own reasonable moral doubts. (pause) You are dangerous, Commander. More dangerous than half the fleet floating outside right now.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Look, Admiral, if you want my resignation, just say so.

PARKER: Not at all, Commander! We're promoting you.

DOVAN: Excuse me?

PARKER: Well, promotion is a strong word. You will continue to hold your current rank of Commander. But we're giving you the *Excelsior* on a permanent basis.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: A moment ago you were sitting there insulting me.

PARKER: You're mistaken. Isaac Brahms was, in many ways, a great man. Even after his arrest, he was loyal to the security of the Federation. Saved it more than once. Certainly more than I have. (pause) We need people like Isaac Brahms on the front line.

DOVAN: I'm not Brahms.

PARKER: Nevertheless, you are now, officially, a starship captain. If there's a crueler punishment in the galaxy, I'm not sure what it is.

DOVAN: You're wrong, admiral.

PARKER: I don't think I am. (pause) The *Excelsior* will complete repairs and restaffing here. Modest base liberties will be permitted; however, due to security concerns, shore leaves will be cancelled, and all transfer requests denied.

DOVAN: That's outrageous. My crew has earned extended leave more than anyone. They won't leak anything about the Sword of Damocles.

PARKER: I'm certain they're a good crew, Commander. But I'm not sure you realize the gravity of the situation. Because you failed to save the galaxy on schedule, the President ordered the complete evacuation of Earth, Vulcan, Andoria, and dozens of other worlds. The entire Federation has been under martial law for weeks, every civilian ship commandeered for evacuation duty. No reason has been given. (pause) But then the *Excelsior* came through this Gateway, and, an hour later, the DEFCON order was cancelled. The evacuation fleet turned around, Starfleet demobilized, the riots ended, and the President began searching desperately for a cover story. People are going to connect the dots, Commander. They've already started. No crew, not even yours, can survive the scrutiny of the entire United Federation of Planets.

DOVAN: You want to sweep this under the rug – and us with it. (pause) I can still resign, Admiral.

PARKER: You won't.

DOVAN: Starfleet Secrecy Act?

PARKER: No: your mission. Here.

(He slides Dovan a padd. Dovan clicks it on and scrolls.)

PARKER: I've read your file. *Ex astris mirificentia*, is it? Wonder from the stars? You came out to this Task Force because you wanted to do some exploring.

DOVAN: Yes, that's right.

PARKER: Then do some exploring. The *Excelsior* and her crew are yours for the next two years. I want you to take her through the Gateway and head into uncharted space. The padd I've handed you shows your course. One year out, one year back.

DOVAN: Why this route? We have no data on this region. Could be anything out there. Or did you just pick the flight path that gets us away from public scrutiny the fastest?

PARKER: We do have an... interest... in the region. There have been some unusual readings from known Iconian ruins on several worlds in the Delta Quadrant. Ghosts. Energy spikes. You name it. The pattern of disruptions points back into this region. We want you to investigate.

DOVAN: And the rest of the time?

PARKER: *Ex astris mirificentia*, Commander.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: You know I've been in the service eighteen years and I've never been within a light-year of a first contact until yesterday? I almost blew it up. Been a long time since my xenocommunications course.

PARKER: We can't all be Tryla Scott.

DOVAN: Exactly. If you'd offered me this mission two days ago, I would've demanded you clap me in irons instead. (pause) But now the only thing I can think of is how I'm going to break the news to Underwood.

PARKER: You won't be. He's receiving new orders as we speak. By this time tomorrow, Joshua Underwood will be a full commander serving as First Officer of the U.S.S. *Voltaire* under Captain Kel Marya. I didn't want to allow a single transfer off *Excelsior*... but it would be extremely unwise, in my opinion, for the two of you to work together again. His report made that very clear.

DOVAN: Really? Underwood's report about me was that bad?

PARKER: Yes, it was. Lieutenant Commander Underwood stated that, despite thorough monitoring as per my orders, he had found no cause to remove you from command of the

Excelsior. Since this is quite obviously a lie, I am forced to conclude that you are a bad influence on him. And probably vice-versa.

DOVAN: I'd better buy him a drink.

PARKER: You'll have to hurry. He won't have much time to pack.

DOVAN: I just need one more thing: a new pilot.

PARKER: Why? Is there something wrong with Ensign Rol?

DOVAN: Lieutenant Rol is more than competent, but, what with his confession to murdering two [officers, I assumed he'd be off the ship.]

PARKER: Ensign Rol was demoted an hour ago, on my authority. However, his request for transfer to the stockade was denied.

DOVAN: But his confession [proves he committed willful murder!]

PARKER: Per regulations, my office will process all documentation Mr. Rol has submitted, and determine whether to prosecute him for his alleged crime... within the next ninety days.

DOVAN: In ninety days, we'll be on the opposite side of the galaxy!

PARKER: Very astute, Commander. Fortunately for all of us, there's no statute of limitations on murder.

DOVAN: So you're going to leave it hanging over Rol's head until all this DEFCON business blows over.

PARKER: I'll certainly be reviewing the documentation he's submitted. Will that be quite all, Commander?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Yes, Admiral.

PARKER: Then report to my dining room at eighteen hundred tomorrow to go over the details of your new mission. (pause) Dismissed, Commander.

DOVAN: You're wrong, Admiral.

PARKER: Sometimes.

DOVAN: I'm not like Isaac Brahms.

PARKER: Is that all? Dismissed.

SCENE 401-15**LOCATION: MARINE COUNTRY MESS**

(There's a party going on. *The Best Is Yet to Come* is playing in the background. Lorchrok and Yubari are at a table. Lorchrok drinks a beverage and sets the empty glass down on the table.)

LORHROK: I can't stop drinking these.

YUBARI: I think that might be enough for you, Lorchrok. We don't want you dancing on tables again.

LORHROK: Oh no you don't, Yubari. Doctor Sharp only let me out of sickbay if I promised to push fluids.

(Dr. Sharp walks up.)

SHARP: That is absolutely not what I meant, Alecz. Mind if I sit?

YUBARI: Busted, Lorchrok!

LORHROK: No, we don't mind, Melissa. Come on. (she sits) I thought you said you were working on paperwork tonight.

SHARP: I was. Transfer request.

LORHROK

Transfer request? What for?

SHARP: Doesn't matter. It was denied. Which freed up my evening for a party, at any rate. (pause) Oh, come on, Asuka — don't give me that look. My request had nothing to do with you.

YUBARI: Then who? I'm Chief of Security. Part of my job is to make you feel comfortable living and working on this starship.

SHARP: I appreciate it, Asuka – really. But my beef's above your paygrade.

UNDERWOOD: You're not talking about me, I hope.

SHARP: Joshua! Have a seat!

UNDERWOOD: I will, thank you, Melissa.

LORHROK: When did you two get to know each other so well?

UNDERWOOD: Well, that's rather a long story. Normally I'd save it for another day, but, since this is my last day on the *Excelsior*...

LORHROK: What?

UNDERWOOD: Yes, I've been... promoted. Parker's not ready to give me a ship yet, but apparently I'm fit to be someone's first officer. I transfer out tomorrow.

LORHROK: Well, congratulations! Let me buy you a drink. Waiter?

SHARP: I thought all transfer requests had been denied.

UNDERWOOD: You heard correctly. I didn't request this.

SHARP: You don't think Alcar [had something to do with this, do you?]

UNDERWOOD: No – honestly, I don't. But that doesn't make me regret it any less. I wasted a chance here. Spent all my time trying to take command; missed everything the *Excelsior* was trying to give me. I should have listened. Not an error I'll make again.

NARRATOR: (in background) *Now, why don't we slow it down a bit? This one's by special request – an old Cardassian tune you might know, which the band is giving its own special twist.*

(pause) So here I am. And I can't help noticing that nobody's answered my question.

YUBARI: Yes, Commander. We were absolutely talking about you. Only bad things, of course.

(Neeva approaches the table.)

NEEVA: You know, I never understood why they all pick on you, Commander Underwood. They seem to think you were the only one who tried to mutiny against Dovan at New Victoria.

UNDERWOOD: That's a good point. Why aren't you all this mean to Lieutenant Commander Neeva?

SHARP: Not to put too fine a point on it, but Neeva was very deliberative and apologetic about committing mutiny.

YUBARI: Annnnd you weren't.

SHARP: I said not too fine a point, Asuka.

YUBARI: Right. So, I was blunt instead.

UNDERWOOD: Consider me duly chastised.

YUBARI: Would you like my seat, Neeva?

NEEVA: No, I just came by to ask Lieutenant Lorhrok there if he'd like to dance. This is one of my favorites, from when I was a kid on KoHt.

LORHROK: I... I'm still feeling pretty weak from everything. You... go ahead.

NEEVA: (sigh) No, it's not worth it without a partner. (pause) You left sickbay pretty fast today. We didn't get a chance to talk.

LORHROK: I thought you could use the rest.

NEEVA: And I thought —

(Pause.)

LORHROK: Yes?

NEEVA: Nothing, I guess. I'll... see you around.

UNDERWOOD: You sure, Commander? We have a chair.

NEEVA: I... think I need to take a rest, let my pheromones finish cleaning out of my system. I must still be a little foggy.

(Neeva begins to leave.)

LORHROK: Have a nice night, Commander.

NEEVA: Yeah... you too. Lieutenant.

SHARP: I'm not sure what I just saw. Are you two okay?

LORHROK: We went through... a lot on Gevinon and... afterward.

SHARP: Do you need counseling?

LORHROK: Um... no. No, I think she'll be fine after some rest.

SHARP: Talk to her.

LORHROK: We're not really... I have to do some thinking, too, about everything that happened.

SHARP: That's a medical order, Lieutenant. Talk to her yourself, or you'll talk to her in my office.

ROL: Better do what she says, Alecz, or she might sic that Borg on you.

LORHROK: (snort) I believe you mean "Monty," Mister Rol.

SHARP: What?

LORHROK: Or, worse – that ridiculous hologram!

ROL: That information is not available.

LORHROK AND ROL: (simultaneous) Database corruption is extensive! (both chuckle and clink their glasses.)

YUBARI: What in the stars are they talking about, Melissa?

SHARP: I have no earthly idea. Gentlemen?

ROL: Can't tell you.

LORHROK: Temporal Prime Directive.

UNDERWOOD: Oh, that old thing.

ROL: I'm not sure what to say, so I'm just going to say it: I can't tell you how happy I am to see you alive, Alecz.

LORHROK: I was just about to tell you the exact same thing, Alex.

(Footsteps in the background.)

DOVAN: Yeah, see, that's not gonna work.

LORHROK: Captain!

ROL: Sir?

DOVAN: I admit it: at first, it was cute. Two people at the senior staff meetings with the same first name.

ROL: Um, they're not the same first name, sir.

LORHROK: "AlecZ" is spelled with a "z".

DOVAN: Like I said... cute. I'm sure Captain Cortez saw it and loved it. But now I'm the captain, and apparently, I'm stuck with both of you for the next couple of years, and I am just too easily confused to put up with it anymore.

ROL: It's really not confusing, sir. He's Alex.

LORHROK: And he's Alex. Hear the difference?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Executive Officer Lorhrok, what's your middle name?

LORHROK: I don't have one, sir.

DOVAN: Ensign Rol, what about you?

ROL: Bevoney, sir.

DOVAN: Praise Kobol. From now on, Ensign, your first name on this starship is "Bev."

ROL: With all due respect, sir, I hate that.

DOVAN: Well... Then too bad you're not the captain. Use it. That's an order. I'll update the computer tonight.

ROL: Yes, sir. And, sir, since Admiral Parker is delaying my... transfer request, I understand I'll be continuing in command of the *Excelsior's* fighter squadron.

DOVAN: I'm not sure. X.O., that sound good to you?

LORHROK: None better, captain.

DOVAN: Then yes, the fighters are all yours, Bev. What about it?

ROL: The squadron needs a name.

UNDERWOOD: When I was captain, the old squadron used to be called the Visionaries.

ROL: That's the six-oh-third. They're still operating out of Pollux, though, so we can't reuse the name.

LORHROK: You have a suggestion?

ROL: Yes. I was thinking of calling them the "Renegades."

NARRATOR: (in background) *Yes, a big hand please for our special guests tonight, live all the way from Bajor, the Deep Space Nine duet!*

(Pause.)

DOVAN: In honor of General Brahms's starship?

ROL: And his sister's before him.

UNDERWOOD: I think that's a terrible idea.

YUBARI: You're not going to be here tomorrow.

SHARP: He's not alone. Isaac Brahms was a serial murderer who died exterminating a species, and he spent most of the month before trying to kill us. The last thing he needs is an onboard memorial.

YUBARI: Really. It was his crew that held the line when we fled to that gas cloud, Melissa. His crew that sacrificed themselves to give us a fighting chance.

ROL: And, in the end, he gave up everything – everything, sir – for us.

LORHROK: And for the memory of his sister, Tryla Scott, the greatest starship captain of the past century.

UNDERWOOD: Revisionist history. We were allies of convenience, nothing more. Rol, he tried to kill you – personally! And he very nearly did it!

ROL: Captain, I've made my request. Respectfully, I ask your decision.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I'll inform you of my decision tomorrow. Right now, I want to make sure we have a great party. It's only fair to the guests of honor, after all. Speaking of whom, where's Neeva?

YUBARI: She headed home for the night.

DOVAN: Shoot. I'll have to fill her in on our mission later, then.

LORHROK: You got a mission briefing, sir?

DOVAN: Yes, I did, Number One. And I think you're going to like it. Take a look out that window.

YUBARI: I don't see anything.

DOVAN: Then you're not looking.

SHARP: It's just... space.

DOVAN: Exactly! Space. The final frontier. That's where we're going. Somewhere out there, right now, a star is exploding. A new colony is harvesting its first crop. There are cities made of flame and skies that scream with song. The *Starship Excelsior*'s mission is to seek them out, and bear witness. (pause) This, ladies and gentlemen, is what we were made for. Rest up. Tomorrow, we're embarking on the greatest adventure of our lives. We've all been given a second chance; get ready to use it.