

Starship Excelsior Transcript
"...There You Are" (Original Pilot)

SCENE 100-01

NARRATOR: The U.S.S. *Excelsior*, NCC-2000-C. Last of the great Dominion War dreadnoughts constructed. First in the hearts and minds of the men and women of Task Force 38. The *Excelsior* was once a ship of legends: Grenn, Dhivael, Underwood, R'iku. From 2375 to 2379, she and her intrepid crew were the first line of defense for the Iconian Gateway that had opened Starfleet's territory to a hard-won sector of the Delta Quadrant.

Two years ago, short of crew, facing Federation-wide force redistribution, the *Excelsior* was temporarily mothballed. One year later, a Borg offensive pushed Starfleet's Delta forces right back through the Gateway to the Alpha Quadrant. High-ranking veterans of the *Excelsior*, scattered throughout Starfleet's leadership, saw this and came to a single conclusion:

Two years is far too long.

-Opening Titles-

CORTEZ: Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Excelsior. Her ongoing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life, and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before.

SCENE 100-02

NARRATOR: USS Excelsior Ready Room. Time: Thirteen hundred hours.

[SFX: Cortez pours a glass of water and takes a sip, leaning back in her seat as she does]

CORTEZ: Captain's Log, Stardate 59932.1. It has been a long wait in dock. The way the refit crews are working, I fear we won't launch until Christmas — or even New Year's Eve. I have no desire to remember 2382 as the year we didn't launch.

Still, with a name like *Excelsior*, we have to get it right. It would be a shame if Starfleet decided that placing the first officer from a small ship like the *Mercury* in command of a ship with this much legacy was a mistake, after all.

Hopefully, as the remainder of our key personnel come aboard and Engineering gets our last critical systems online, we'll get a clearer picture of where we stand.

[SFX: door chime]

CORTEZ: End log. [to the door] Come in.

[SFX: Adow enters]

CORTEZ: Crewman Adow. Just the person I wanted to see. How goes the battle?

ADOW : Battle?

CORTEZ: The battle to get everything up and running, Crewman.

ADOW : (hostile) We're done the upgrades and diagnostics; most of my crews now transporting back to the Starbase.

CORTEZ: Windows cleaned, hull polished?

ADOW : (irrationally hostile) That all, sir?

CORTEZ: That's all, Crewman.

[SFX: Cortez stands. Both exit to the Main Bridge. Adow heads for the turbolift; Cortez moves toward her center seat.]

CORTEZ: (sighs)

DOVAN: Something wrong, Captain?

CORTEZ: Don't you hate maintenance crews?

They come aboard a ship, think they're God's gift to engineering, and then take two months to do routine upgrades. I'm pretty sure our own engineering teams could have done the work themselves.

DOVAN: (sarcastically) But that's not procedure, Captain.

CORTEZ: (snorts)

DOVAN: Besides, they wouldn't have anything to *do* without ships like ours. They have to tinker with something or they'd start taking the Starbase apart.

CORTEZ: Indeed.

DOVAN: At least they're done now.

CORTEZ: Well, there is that. Twenty-four hours and they'll all finally be gone.

DOVAN: (slyly smiling) Now we can fix all the things they messed with.

CORTEZ: (chuckling) Commander Dovan, I relieve you.

[SFX: Cortez sits.]

DOVAN: I stand relieved. Enjoy alpha shift, captain.

CORTEZ: Oh, I will. Good day, Commander.

[SFX: Dovan goes to the turbolift.]

CORTEZ: Bridge to Engineering... how is it down there, Lieutenant Lorhrok?

SCENE 100-02a

LOCATION: Main Engineering

LORHROK: Good morning, Captain. You want the long story or the short one?

[Following section is background banter that takes place underneath the main scene:]

(CORTEZ: Which am I going to like to hear more?)

LORHROK: Probably neither.

CORTEZ: I was afraid of that. Summarize.

LORHROK: You know the Fleet opinion of these refit crews. Lazy, high-handed...

CORTEZ: Critical to the operation of this vessel...

LORHROK: That too.

CORTEZ: So what's the problem?

LORHROK: Personally, I don't think the Excelsior needs many of these 'upgrades.' She's a fine ship with or without a 1% increase in data transfer speeds, or a 2% boost in replicator efficiency, or---

CORTEZ: Point taken. How long is it going to take?

LORHROK: Probably another — what are those two...? Excuse me, captain.

CORTEZ: Permission granted.)

[Elsewhere in Engineering, Crewmen Harkless and Adow are talking. They are in the foreground:]

HARKLESS: Adow, be sure that ODN wiring is secure.

ADOW : What, on the weapons relays? What's the point?

HARKLESS: What makes you say that?

ADOW : This ship is hittin' the *Delta Quadrant*, Harkless. It be a nasty piece of real estate, that.

HARKLESS: Well, they'll have all of Task Force 38 to back them up.

ADOW : That's Borg space, Harkless. Even with our upgrades, this ship don't stand a chance in a fight.

What we *should* be working on is the engines; they're gonna need to dance real fast if the Borg catch--

LORHROK: Do you have a problem with this ODN conduit, subcrew?

ADOW : Oh, no, *sir*. (sarcastic)

LORHROK: You have a problem, mister?

ADOW : (after the briefest hesitation) I don't think a junior grade lieutenant should be Chief Engineer aboard a ship as grand as the *Excelsior*. One of the most prestigious ships in the whole fleet, and they give it to you of all plain-Jaynes?

LORHROK: I'm sure Captain Cortez has her reasons, crewman. Now, if you don't want me to have you put on report for those comments, I'd suggest you get the hell out of my engineering bay. You've just been reassigned to waste reclamation.

ADOW : (with disgust) I do have to finish —

LORHROK: Speaking, or else you're going to be on report. Is that clear?

ADOW : (gritting her teeth) Yes, sir.

[SFX: she walks away]

LORHROK: Anything to add, Crewman Harkless?

HARKLESS: No, sir! Nothing to add, sir!

LORHROK: Carry on, Crewman.

LORHROK: Sorry about that, captain. Minor problem down here. Anyhow, about the holodeck relays...

SCENE 100-03

LOCATION: First Officer's Quarters

NARRATOR: In the first officer's quarters, Lt. Cmdr. Alcar Dovan was working hard on a duty roster he had promised to Captain Cortez before the next day's senior staff meeting. So hard was he working that "next day's meeting" had slipped into "today's meeting" without him even noticing. At oh-one-hundred, however, he finally looked away from his work long enough to yawn.

[SFX: Dovan puts down the PADD he's working on.]

DOVAN: (groan)

[SFX: Dovan then picks up the PADD again, scans it for another few seconds, then, giving up, puts it down again]

DOVAN: What the hell am I doing here?

[SFX: he leans back in his seat]

DOVAN: Two years on Gault, first day back I *demand* to be assigned to Task Force 38, I'm completely unreasonable, and they make me an X.O. on the finest ship in the fleet. Better question might be what the hell were *they* thinking. After all, *I'm* getting the best of both worlds. Exploration, wonder, awe... (darkly) and not a front-line transfer order within 70,000 light years.

You're talking to yourself, Alcar. Back to work. You have a captain to impress.

[SFX: Dovan picks up the PADD again and begins working on it]

NARRATOR: Now that he was back in Starfleet, Lieutenant Commander Dovan was rather surprised at how many little things around the ship — the insignia, the nameless

ensigns he passed in the hallway, the distinct scent of Starfleet *raktajino*—how much it all reminded him of the long minutes and days and weeks of a war that had ended seven years ago. The great Dominion War. He had to admit that it was shaking him more than he would like. Even the simple beep of a communications call could be a shock.

[SFX: intercom beep]

DOVAN: (small, surprised gasp)

COMPUTER: An incident report has been filed. Would you like to review it?

DOVAN: (surprised) Incident report?

Why not? Play it, computer.

[SFX: he presses a button]

ADOW: Commander Dovan. My name is Kinash Adow. I'm assigned to the refit teams currently completing the overhaul of your Engineering systems. This report regards an incident that took place in Engineering today at thirteen hundred hours. This afternoon, I was performing routine maintenance around the secondary ODN node when —

DOVAN: Computer, halt playback.

[SFX: computer boops]

DOVAN: Convert the remainder of the report to text and display on screen.

[SFX: computer boops, then scrolls]

DOVAN: (as he reads) Kinash Adow... I've heard that name somewhere. Hm... Borg space... Chief Engineer... cruel and unusual... subcrew. Subcrew? Is that even a word?... Hmph.

Sounds like my compliments to our Chief Engineer on handling this. Computer!

[SFX: computer boops]

DOVAN: Append the following comment to this report: Quote, "Can't say I blame him," unquote. Now stamp it and refile it.

[SFX: computer boops]

DOVAN: Now, Computer, maybe you can help me. Where have I heard the name "Adow" before?

COMPUTER: Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan on Stardate 59931.7 approved the transfer of Crewman Kinash Adow from Starbase 911 refit crew to USS Excelsior, Engineering section.

DOVAN: Ag! I *knew* I wasn't going to like that. Thank you, comp—

[SFX: intercom beeps]

LORTH: Transporter Room 3 to the Executive Officer.

DOVAN: Dovan here.

LORTH: Um... sir, I don't mean to bother you, but, ah, we're still having a pretty serious malfunction down here.

DOVAN: (awkwardly) All your molybdenum components are rematerializing as niobium. Yes, I heard. Someone will be down right away.

LORTH: If I may, sir, when? Chief Terrel said he reported this during last shift, and —

DOVAN: I understand, Chief. It's been a busy day up here.

LORTH: *Yes, sir.*

DOVAN: Dovan out. It's been a busy day... and I forgot! For six hours!

(frustrated sigh) Can't let that happen again... Dovan to Lorrerrr —

Blasted consonants... Dovan to Lorhaha —

Dovan to the Chief Engineer!

LORHROK: Lorhrok here, sir.

DOVAN: Lieutenant. I was going to apologize for waking you, but I see that's not necessary.

LORHROK: (grinning) *Not a problem, sir. Just burning the midnight oil.*

DOVAN: Excellent. I'd like to see you in Transporter Bay 3, on the double.

LORHROK: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: And, Lieutenant... bring your little black bag.

[pause]

LORHROK: ...I'm on my way.

DOVAN: Acknowledged. Dovan out.

SCENE 100-04

LOCATION: Transport Room 3

NARRATOR: It took Lorhrok twenty minutes to get there. His boss was already on the scene.

[SFX: Lorhrok enters]

LORHROK: (sniffs) Do you smell that?

DOVAN: (very slightly surprised) Only a little, and, given that Bolians have a much better sense of smell than Trill, I'm surprised that you do.

[A.N. Note obvious authorial wish fulfillment.]

LORHROK: I was a transporter operator for a while. Not much to do except stand around and wait for something to happen. Something I can do about it?

DOVAN: Yes. Chief Lorth here has informed me that our restocking effort has been delayed due to the fact that all molybdenum elements are materializing as niobium on the pad.

LORHROK: I'll get right on it, sir. Smells like a problem with the molecular imaging scanners.

LORTH: Uhm, smells, sir?

LORHROK: Yes, Chief, smells. A bit like a burnt plasma conduit mixed with the unique fragrance of a malfunctioning self-sealing stem bolt with a melted interface component.

LORTH: I... see, sir.

DOVAN: (matter-of-factly) Don't worry, yourself, Chief. It's well-documented that officers have improved senses of smell. You've got this well in hand, then, Lieutenant?

LORHROK: Yes, sir. Should have the grid online in about forty-seven minutes.

DOVAN: "About" forty-seven? Don't be too specific, Lieutenant; it'll look bad if you're off. Oh, and, one more thing: I'm finishing up the duty roster. Any preferences?

LORHROK: There's one person I think would be a great fit for the chief engineer's job. Lieutenant junior grade, young, remarkable engineering skills, brilliant holonovel writer, great looks —

DOVAN: (wry) I think I see where this is going.

[SFX: he makes a notation on his padd]

DOVAN: And you'll want to keep Adow in waste reclamation, I hope?

LORHROK: (irritated) You know about that? What, did she go over my head or something?

DOVAN: Not at all, Lieutenant. I'm first officer of this starship. I know everything.

[SFX: comm beep]

AMARA: Bridge to Commander Dovan.

DOVAN: Dovan here.

AMARA: You asked to be informed when Commander Helder's shuttle was arriving. The Mendez has just been cleared for final docking procedures.

DOVAN: Thank you, Lieutenant. Dovan out. It seems I'm late. Excuse me, gentlemen.

[SFX: Dovan exits into the corridor, which is nearly empty in the middle of the night]

DOVAN: (to self) I know everything, perhaps, except how to run a starship. Now how to get that transporter stench out of my nose? Smells like... rotten eggs flecked with charred Jem'Hadar bits.

...Where the hell did that thought come from?

[SFX: Doctor Sharp and Alex Rol round a corner.]

SHARP: Sorry, sir?

DOVAN: Oh, Doctor Sharp! Nothing — just one of those stray thoughts.

SHARP: So, not nothing.

DOVAN: You have a sharp tongue, Doctor. Watch out for it, Mister Rol. What exactly are the two of you doing, anyhow?

SHARP: Lieutenant Rol has just kindly offered to escort me to my quarters, now that I'm aboard.

DOVAN: And carry your things, I note. Strange, isn't it, how all the senior officers are coming aboard in the dead of night? A pleasant evening to you both.

ROL: Yes, sir. Good night, sir.

[SFX: Dovan leaves]

SHARP: Thank you again, sir, for doing this. It's nice not to be the little short woman dragging her things through the hall for once.

ROL: It's my pleasure, ma'am. You have to keep in shape on the Special Ops team, after all.

SHARP: That's right... you're special operations. I had forgotten. But not the team leader, as I understand it.

ROL: No, ma'am. That'd be Lieutenant Leo Amara. And he's busy right now trying to get the captain to keep our team separate from the Marine squad hierarchy. In the meantime, now that Ensign MacBride's assignment has been cancelled, I'm covering tactical, and Lieutenant Amara is chief of security until we can find a replacement. So special operations is getting far too much... (with loathing) 'free time'... while the marines are busy (with relish) *training*.

SHARP: (disapproving) I didn't realize this was one of the starships with a marine detachment aboard.

ROL: Really? I would have thought that would be a little hard to miss on the Basic Info sheet.

SHARP: I just applied for whatever starship duty I could get. It's good for my career, or so I'm told. I wasn't looking too closely when I was invited to join a crew. Hm.

Look, Lieutenant, I'm aware my rank is lower than yours, but I'd appreciate it if you spread the word around Marine Country that I am less than amused by careless injuries, and I have absolutely no respect for preserving 'honorable combat wounds' or anything of the like. And there's *nothing* I hate more than repeat customers.

ROL: (intrigued) Is that an order, Ensign?

SHARP: Of course not, sir. I can't give you orders. I can, however, withhold painkillers or any manner of other useful medical arts whenever I please without anyone becoming the wiser.

ROL: Sounds like we have a bargain.

SHARP: Then I think our departments are going to get along splendidly.

ROL: I certainly hope so. We're here. These are going to be your quarters, ma'am.

SHARP: (smiling) And my name's already on the door. Again, sir, a thousand thanks for doing this.

ROL: It was a pleasure. Good night, Doctor.

SHARP: Good night, sir.

[SFX: She goes into her quarters.]

SCENE 100-05

LOCATION: Observation Lounge

NARRATOR: The next morning, Captain Cortez stood in the observation lounge. Having just dismissed a young lieutenant, she stood, hands folded behind her back, looking out the window at the bustle of the spacedock lattices. She was waiting for her next appointment. She did not wait for very long.

[SFX: Leo Amara enters. Cortez does not turn around.]

AMARA: Sir?

CORTEZ: Mister Amara.

AMARA: Yes, sir.

CORTEZ: 'Captain' will do fine, Lieutenant.

AMARA: Sorry, captain.

CORTEZ: [still looking out the window] Spacedock is an incredible place. So many worker bees, so many components and lights. All just cogs in part of one great machine. All of it, from the simple metal floating outside to the efforts, the dreams, the *work* that went into this... all of it is going into just one thing. Getting us... [she nods at the stars that are visible through the latticework] out *there*. [She turns around.] You have something for me, Lieutenant?

[SFX: He snaps to attention]

AMARA: Second Lieutenant Leo Amara reporting for duty.

CORTEZ: Your orders?

[SFX: Amara hands her a padd. She scrolls and thumbprints it, then hands it back.]

CORTEZ: You'll want to present these to the Marine Commander before you settle in.

AMARA: Sir — I mean, Captain, that's actually something I wanted to talk to you about.

CORTEZ: I don't believe there's anything to discuss. Special Operations falls under the umbrella of the Marine Division.

AMARA: With respect, Captain, I haven't been a Marine for quite some time now.

CORTEZ: I'm well aware of your service record, Second Lieutenant. However, my decision is made.

AMARA: Captain...

CORTEZ: You will still be in command of your unit, but you will report to the Marine Commander. Dismissed.

[SFX: Amara half-turns, preparing to leave, but doesn't actually move.]

CORTEZ: Something else, Lieutenant?

AMARA: I just wanted to convey how unhappy I am with your decision.

CORTEZ: Lieutenant, I am aware that you had a certain amount of latitude in your last assignment, but that's over and you'd better get used to it. I won't tolerate elitist attitudes from any division on this ship. Now, do we have a problem?

AMARA: No... sir.

CORTEZ: (cooly) Dismissed.

[SFX: Amara leaves]

CORTEZ: (deep, irritated breath)

[SFX: intercom beep]

ROL: Bridge to Cortez.

CORTEZ: Go ahead.

ROL: Admiral Parker is on a secure channel for you, Captain.

CORTEZ: Put her through here, Lieutenant.

[SFX: Cortez sits as the viewer activates. Admiral Parker turns out to be a man.]

CORTEZ: (pleasantly) Admiral. What can I do for you, sir?

PARKER: Captain. I trust you're settling in aboard the *Excelsior*?

CORTEZ: Just looking for a place to hang my pictures, sir.

PARKER: Normally Admiral Tenson would be speaking to you, but, with the *Tornado* on assignment, I'll be the one briefing you on your first mission.

CORTEZ: Go ahead, sir.

PARKER: You've probably given some thought to why you were assigned to the *Excelsior*?

CORTEZ: It had crossed my mind, Admiral. I'm sure there were a great many candidates who might have come before me.

PARKER: Not to mince words, but you weren't even on the initial list for command of the *Excelsior*. You were high on the list for the *Atlanta*.

CORTEZ: Well, I would have expected something along the lines of a *New Orleans*-class ship. What shifted me from the *Atlanta* to the *Excelsior*?

PARKER: Part of it was this mission. Part of it we will go into at another time.

CORTEZ: If I may, Admiral... are you referring to the *Anbar*?

PARKER: Captain Cortez, you will *not* refer to that on an open channel. Is that understood?

CORTEZ: Yes, sir.

PARKER: We've been waiting for some time to send a ship to a world called Valandria. Are you familiar with it?

CORTEZ: Mildly. They have warp drive, but both of our first contact attempts have been rebuffed. They're fairly close to the Iconian Gateway, aren't they?

PARKER: They are... and, after last year's Borg attack, our analysts have determined that Valandria is in a strategically valuable location. We think it's time to make another try at establishing diplomatic relations, and you, Captain, are on a very short list of potential candidates to meet with their Premier.

CORTEZ: I'm sorry, Admiral, but how so?

PARKER: You're a very well-established combat officer, Captain. You have an air of it in your attitude, and that's important to the Valandrin. They are not a diplomatic people: they respect strength and fight to establish status. Our misunderstanding of this

is why our first mission failed. The *Excelsior*, however, is a *Sovereign*-class starship. It will be a *massive* show of strength, and they will respect what her captain has to say.

CORTEZ: I'm still a little confused about my part in this. There are a lot of seasoned captains whose experiences eclipse my own.

PARKER: Valandrian society is strongly matriarchal. Although their males are strong warriors, they will only acknowledge a female as leader — a detail that derailed our *second* contact mission. Out of the *female* candidates for this mission, you were at the top of the list. You have deep space experience, an excellent combat record, and your profile shows that you take a strong position where you need to. That's exactly what we were looking for for this mission.

CORTEZ: So, essentially, my gender secured me this assignment?

PARKER: You know what they say, Captain: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. You're a skilled officer and you'll make an excellent captain if you don't get hung up on the details. The Valandria situation got you this assignment; now make the most of it.

CORTEZ: Yes, sir.

PARKER: Good luck, captain. Parker out.

[SFX: the screen is about to turn off... but another face appears instead, surprising Cortez. She hides it well.]

CORTEZ: General Brahms. I didn't expect to hear from you so soon.

BRAHMS: Just wanted to check in before you got underway. And Admiral Parker's transmission made for an excellent piggyback feed. I assume she bought the entire Valandria story?

CORTEZ: Completely. And, before you ask, Lieutenant Yubari came aboard early this morning. She's already begun setting up.

BRAHMS: Good, good.

CORTEZ: General, if I may, I think she'd be much better able to carry out her mission if she knew entirely what it was about. I'd like to —

BRAHMS: No. No, Captain, I'm sorry, but we simply can't trust any information about the *Anbar* to anyone without the proper clearances. The longer Lt. Yubari believes she's merely doing routine surveillance — and as long as your crew believes the Valandria cover story — the better. For all of us.

CORTEZ: I see. Is there anything else, General?

BRAHMS: No, Captain, like I said... just checking in. Good hunting.

CORTEZ: Thank you, General.

BRAHMS: Brahms out.

SCENE 100-06

LOCATION: Lorhrok's Quarters

NARRATOR: Chief Engineer Alecz Lorhrok, after a long, hard night chasing bugs in the refit *Excelsior* systems, had allowed himself eighteen minutes to sleep before dealing with anything else. Then it would be time for breakfast.

[SFX: the alarm clock goes off]

LORHROK: uhhhn... That's what I get for not paying close enough attention when a diagnostic clearly shows a feedback loop in circuit forty-four. A big mess, a two hour backlog, and... and I'll finish this complaint when I'm more awake.

[SFX: Lorhrok stands up.]

LORHROK: (groan) Computer, give me a... a...

COMPUTER: Please restate request.

LORHROK: (glaring) I'll take my time; that okay with you?

COMPUTER: Please restate the question.

LORHROK: Agh! Forget about it, Computer. Just give me a jumja stick. Nothing like Bajoran candy to keep you on your feet.

[SFX: the replicator produces a jumja stick. Lorhrok puts it in his mouth.]

LORHROK: Blech! (he almost chokes) Computer! Identify the most recently replicated item at the replicator in my quarters!

COMPUTER: One standard Bajoran —

LORHROK: Forget it. I have to get to work.

[SFX: he exits to the corridor]

LORHROK: Lorhrok to Engineering.

HARKLESS: Crewman Harkless here, sir. What can I do for you?

LORHROK: Who's worked on the Deck Four replicator systems within the past few days?

HARKLESS: Let me check, sir... The duty log shows several refit subcrews were working on it, the most recent one within the past twelve hours.

LORHROK: Hm. I don't suppose Crewman Adow was on any of those subcrews, was she?

HARKLESS: Actually, sir... she was. She led the most recent team.

LORHROK: Acknowledged. Thank you, Crewman. Lorhrok out.

[SFX: Lorhrok enters a turbolift]

LORHROK: Oh, and thus does the *Excelsior's* first combat action begin... (to turbolift) Deck 16.

[SFX: Dovan rounds a corner and comes running down the hall]

DOVAN: Wait! Wait! Hold the lift!

LORHROK: Computer, hold!

DOVAN: Thanks, Lieutenant. (to the lift) Deck 1, but not until we drop off our Chief Engineer. (to Lorhrok) Lieutenant Lorhrok, you'd better quick get on the Smile Shuttle, or else Judah the Starfleet Otter might come and try to cheer you up.

LORHROK: (despondently) . . .yes, sir.

DOVAN: Chief, I hate to add to your workload (that's a lie), but—look, have you ever heard of Tarin juice?

LORHROK: No, sir.

DOVAN: Well, I was talking to one of the Maquis from *Voyager* a few years after they got back. He told me about this drink—it's an Enaran delicacy—and said it was about as smooth of a caffeine vehicle you'd ever find. Possibly the best thing he drank in the Delta Quadrant. Now, unfortunately, I left Starfleet before I had a chance to download the replicator pattern, and, when I got home, I was unpleasantly surprised to find that all *Voyager* files had been classified to civilians.

So today, now that I'm finally back, and I'm actually going to be *in* the Delta Quadrant for the first time, I thought it was finally time to try it out.

LORHROK: (extra despondent) It was the replicator, wasn't it?

DOVAN: Tasted like paint thinner.

LORHROK: You're not the only one, sir. Pretty much everything on Decks 4 and 7 is erratic. *This* diagnostic actually showed that 5 and 6 are out completely, though I doubt that. Normally, we'd have three engineering teams working on this, but, what with the launch coming up—

DOVAN: (understanding) You've just got the one team.

LORHROK: No, sir. Every member of engineering is assigned to other duties right now, and we've all been working double shifts for three days straight.

DOVAN: So what exactly is the chief engineer doing working on something with such a low priority?

LORHROK: I'm off duty, sir. I—

DOVAN: Excuse me?

LORHROK: I'm off duty, sir, so I—

DOVAN: You're an excellent actor, then, Mr. Lorhrok. If I didn't know better, I'd say you'd just worked through the entire night.

LORHROK: (flustered) Yes, sir, that's exactly —

DOVAN: Lieutenant, depending on her orders, the *Excelsior* could have to launch at any time, on a moment's notice. Aside from combat, there is absolutely no time when I more value an engineer at the top of his game than when we are moving this kilometer-long, glorified tin can through an opening the size of my planet's capital city with just a couple of decameters between us and pulverization. Call it flight anxiety, but you are now off-duty until Gamma shift. You are to spend the time between then and now unconscious, preferably sleeping, but phaser-stunned if necessary.

LORHROK: [simultaneous] But — I — !

DOVAN: [simultaneous] That's an order.

[pause]

LORHROK: (giving in) Yes, sir.

DOVAN: Well, then, shouldn't you be getting back to your quarters?

LORHROK: Actually, sir, there's one more thing I really have to do. Then I'll get to my quarters. I promise.

[SFX: turbolift stops, doors open]

DOVAN: It's Adow. Isn't it?

LORHROK: I don't know what you're talking about, sir.

DOVAN: Lieutenant, make it painful.

LORHROK: Do what to who, sir?

DOVAN: She owes me a glass of Tarin juice... Good day, Mr. Lorhrok.

SCENE 100-07

LOCATION: Bridge

[SFX: The bridge this morning is bustling with people and with noise. Really busy.]

[SFX: Dovan arrives from the turbolift]

DOVAN: (quietly) Good morning, bridge.

ENSIGN: Oh, I'm sorry, sir!

DOVAN: Excuse me, ensign. My fault.

BACKGROUND CREW #1: Sir, I really need some information on —

BACKGROUND CREW #2: Welcome to Tenacityville. Population: you.

HELDER: (fading in as we approach) ...you've got to make sure the chair spins right.

DOVAN: Oh, Commander Helder! I didn't know you'd come aboard!

HELDER: Good morning, sir. I assume you're my new X.O.?

DOVAN: You assume correctly. Hope you slept well last night.

HELDER: Not especially; I was a bit distracted. But I'm still fit for duty. What can a freshly assigned Chief Flight Control Officer do around here, Commander?

DOVAN: At the moment? Tell me where Captain Cortez is. I don't see her.

HELDER: Oh, she's in her ready room, sir. Anything important?

DOVAN: Only to her, me, and one particular crewmember. Thank you, Commander.

HELDER: Any time. (to refitter) Now, how are we coming here...?

[SFX: doorbell press]

CORTEZ: (through the door) Come!

[SFX: Dovan enters the Ready Room.]

CORTEZ: Commander. I trust you're settling in alright; what can I do for you?

DOVAN: Captain.

[SFX: he hands her the duty roster]

DOVAN: Figured that, long as the duty roster's done, you might like a look before the 1400 staff meeting.

[SFX: she scrolls through it]

DOVAN: Dr. Sharp's medical team isn't set in stone; I was only able to talk to her this morning, and she'd like twenty-four hours to get to know her team before making any decisions.

CORTEZ: That's fine with me. Anything else?

DOVAN: Well, I just put our chief engineer to bed. It is my judgment that he be allowed to rest until Gamma shift. Of course, knowing a few engineers in my life, I doubt he'll do any sleeping, but, I don't know; it's a little — may I speak candidly, captain?

[pause]

CORTEZ: (guardedly) Granted.

DOVAN: Do you really think a junior lieutenant has the Starfleet experience to run an engine room? I mean, I like the kid fine — he seems like a good leader, and, one day, he'll be an excellent engineer. But, here and now, he can barely keep his eyes open for thirty hours straight. How many times has he been in an engine room during a combat situation, much less commanded during combat?

DOVAN: I suppose what I'm asking is... What about Mr. Lorchok recommended him to you? And am I completely out of line?

[pause]

CORTEZ: Commander, would you like to have a seat?

[SFX: Dovan takes a seat quickly]

CORTEZ: Well, first things first, why don't we rephrase your question to something a little more... candid? You'd like to know how the hell somebody like Aleczhander ended up running the engine room on one of the most powerful ships in Starfleet.

You know how many candidates I had for Chief Engineer? Thirty-two, ranging from junior lieutenants to full commanders. I don't know if it's just the class, or the name of the ship, but people threw their hats in. I even had a Lieutenant Barnett from the *Enterprise* get a recommendation.

DOVAN: Doesn't that validate my question, Captain? Why Lieutenant Junior Grade Alec Lorchok?

CORTEZ: (firmly) *Character*, Commander. You can have the finest personnel in Starfleet, but if they can't work with you, you're not getting the best. I looked at my personnel on what they would offer the *Excelsior*. Aleczhander knew the U.S.S. *Steadfast* from stem to stern, not by reading specs, but by crawling through every Jefferies Tube

in order to get to know the ship — and *every* ship is different. The *Enterprise*, the *Lexington*, the *Excelsior* . . . we're all *Sovereign*-class, built to spec, but none of us are the same and Aleczhander is an engineer who will spend every waking minute courting the *Excelsior* until he knows her every quirk. You see what I mean?

I build my crew on people, not records. Anyone can sound wonderful with a good recommendation and a few years' experience; I'm looking for people who are ready to make that break from good officer to great one.

DOVAN: I—

[SFX: the door chimes]

CORTEZ: No rest for the wicked, I'm afraid. (to door) Come!

[SFX: door opens, and Lt. Cmdr. Helder enters]

CORTEZ: Ah, Commander Helder. Please, come in. (to Dovan) Is there anything else, Mister Dovan?

DOVAN: No, captain. And thank you.

CORTEZ: Of course. Dismissed.

DOVAN: I'll see you at 1400, then.

CORTEZ: Mr. Helder. I'd been hoping to speak with you. Although we have quite a few marine pilots...

[SFX: Dovan exits.]

SCENE 100-08

LOCATION: Main Engineering

[SFX: Lorhrok is programming the computer while the narrator narrates.]

NARRATOR: In addition to being an excellent engineer, Alecz Lorhrok was also an accomplished computer programmer. Once he was into the Engineering computer, he worked quickly. This was fortunate, as he closed the program just barely in time.

[SFX: As Lorhrok closes the program, the main engineering bay doors open. Lorhrok turns to see who's coming in.]

LORHROK: (to self) Well, speak of the parasite.

[SFX: Adow walks over to him]

ADOW : Crewman Kinash Adow reporting for shift command duty, sir!

LORHROK: (stiffly) I stand relieved, crewman. Congratulations on your transfer from the refit crew to the *Excelsior* proper. Computer, log Crewman Adow as the on-duty engineer. Transfer command of the primary control console to her.

COMPUTER: Acknowledged. Current on-duty engineer registered as Crewman Kinash Adow.

ADOW : (smirking) Thank you, sir. I'll get to work right quick.

LORHROK: You might want to check on the replicator systems on Decks Four through Seven; they were showing some... interesting fluctuations earlier. A level-five diagnostic should do it.

ADOW : Right straight. I can handle it, sir. You can go back to her quarters now.

[SFX: Lorhrok exits]

NARRATOR: Lorhrok left, but did not go back to his quarters. Instead, he ducked into the chief engineer's office situated immediately next to the Main Engineering doors and spooled up the internal cameras. He wanted to see this.

A peculiar thing about Starfleet computer systems is that they have the capability of identifying any crewmember using them. They can then instantaneously reconfigure every button to match that crewmember's favorite control scheme. Panels move, colors change, and controls appear and disappear, all in the wink of an eye.

Crewman Adow is about to discover the true extent of these capabilities... rather unpleasantly.

ADOW: Crewman Harkless, I'm about to run a level-five diagnostic of the replicator system. It should only take a minute, but make sure nobody shuts down internal sensors while I'm doing it.

HARKLESS: Yes, sir.

ADOW: Initiating...

[SFX: Adow presses a button]

SPEAKERS: I'm a Science Genius Girl / I won the science fair / I wear a white lab coat

[We change perspective to the Chief Engineer's Office, where Lorhrok is watching this on the security cameras.]

SPEAKERS: *DNA strands in my hair. / When I clone a human being... [etc., continues in background]*

LORHROK: (bursts out laughing)

[We change perspective back to Engineering.]

NARRATOR: As Adow had moved to begin the scan, Lorhrok's program had self-activated upon detecting her. An instant before she touched the panel, the entire console reconfigured itself so that her finger was resting over a "play" button. Which she then pressed.

ADOW : What?!

[SFX: Adow presses buttons]

NARRATOR: But every time she got her finger close to the "Cancel" button, it would vanish and reappear halfway across the control board. And, much to Lieutenant Lorhrok's amusement, more heads turned to watch her with every lunge.

HARKLESS: Umm, sir, do you need some help with that?

ADOW : (scathingly) Well spotted, Cadet!

[SFX: Harkless presses one button. The music stops instantly.]

[Back in the Chief Engineer's Office...]

LORHROK: Time for the entrance. . .

[SFX: Lorhrok re-enters Engineering]

LORHROK: Problem, Crewman?

ADOW : (fuming) Everything is under control, sir. The situation has been dealt with.

LORHROK: Glad we agree. Try to keep it down, will you?

[SFX: Lorchok exits.]

NARRATOR: Junior Lieutenant Alec Lorchok had entered Engineering as a hard worker . . . and left as its Chief.

SCENE 100-09

LOCATION: Conference Room

NARRATOR: At fourteen hundred hours, Captain Cortez was sitting at the head of the conference table, looking out the window at the drydock spaceframe wrapped around the *Excelsior* like a full-body cast. She had never been crazy about sitting in one place for too long, and they had been docked for decidedly too long. Fortunately, this conference would resolve exactly how much more of this she would have to endure.

[SFX: Dr. Sharp enters, last to arrive.]

SHARP: Sorry I'm late. Some hazardous medical supplies needing careful supervision in Sickbay.

CORTEZ: It's alright, Doctor; we were just about to get started. I trust work onboard is progressing well?

NARRATOR: Alcar had come in carrying a small, disorganized mountain of padds, each with their own piece of ship-critical information on them: from the most recent modifications to that blasted duty roster to a detailed inventory of the ship's food stores and long-term survivability projections should they for some reason be cut off from food re-supply; from a brief discussion concerning the calibration of the matter-antimatter ratio to a rather lengthy dissertation on the continuing paint job Starbase Work Crews D through G were overseeing underneath the port nacelle; from Lieutenant Alex Rol's most recent Tactical Readiness Report, which Dovan could swear Rol was putting out at a rate exceeding three a day, to a few notes about the diplomacy staff he had taken while chatting with the affable Ensign Rick Hunter on the way in. Now that they were all laid out in front of him, however, and he could see the great big picture that all these minute details combined to create, he saw that his answer was simple. Was work onboard progressing well?

DOVAN: Yes, ma'am.

CORTEZ: Very... succinct, Commander.

The main reason I called this meeting is to set up a time frame and to talk about our first assignment. But, first things first, are your departments and the ship ready to launch? Captain Hastings, you first. For those who haven't met him, this is Marine Captain John Hastings, in charge of the Marine and Special Operations Divisions aboard the *Excelsior*.

HASTINGS: Thank you, Captain. Yes, both of my divisions are present and accounted for, and I like what I've seen. Ideally we'll have time for small-unit battle drills so each marine becomes familiar with his teammates, but they are good to go as-is if needed.

CORTEZ: Chief Engineer Lorhrok.

LORHROK: Captain, the *Excelsior* is one of the finest ships I can imagine serving on. All of our primary life support systems are at full capacity, and judging by the look of the diagnostics, we won't have to re-supply for the expected fifteen years. Main deflector and drive systems register as ready. The warp core is operating at full strength, EPS grids look fine, tractor beams are fully functional... in short, the *Excelsior* is as close to perfect as she's going to get. Engineering is ready at your order.

CORTEZ: I see. Lieutenant Junior Grade Alex Rol, temporary tactical officer. He is also X.O. of our special operations unit, but, for now, Lieutenant, the tactical report if you would.

ROL: Thank you, ma'am. Shield grid diagnostics show maximum operational efficiency. The phaser emitters are all functional and have been tested by the dock crew, although I would like to conduct a live-fire test after we leave port. Our torpedo bays are full and launchers are now fully operational. All the armouries are stocked and secured, and Lieutenant Amara is seeing to it that security personnel are conducting daily training exercises.

CORTEZ: Doctor Sharp?

SHARP: I really have only had a chance to take a quick look at the medical situation, but it looks great so far. I would like to see all new crewmembers for medical checks. My staff has done a fair percentage of the crew who have been here longer than a month, but we still have about a hundred or so who haven't gotten around to coming in yet. [looks around the table] A lot of you are on my list. I know you're all very busy, but make some time. I mean it.

CORTEZ: And I'll support the doctor every step of the way on that. Get your medwork done, gentlemen. Ensign Rick Hunter, Diplomatic Liaison.

HUNTER: Thank you, Captain. My department... we're in great shape. We can handle anything from treaty negotiations between implacable enemies to a royal wedding.

DOVAN: Factoring everything in, Captain, I think we can be underway in seventy-two hours.

CORTEZ: Then I want to schedule the launch for the day after tomorrow. Use any resources you need to finish off the preparations.

NARRATOR: Dovan opened his mouth to point out that that was only forty-*eight* hours, then realized that the Captain probably was not making an error in arithmetic.

[SFX: Cortez stands and activates the viewer]

CORTEZ: Our destination is the Valandrian system. We've been assigned to meet with the Valandrin and attempt to create a productive diplomatic relationship. I trust you've all reviewed the supplemental material I transmitted to you concerning their race?

Good. Their proximity to the gateway to the Alpha Quadrant makes them prime candidates as allies. I don't need to explain the advantages of having friends around

the Gateway... even friends like the Valandrin, who might not meet our... conventional standards... for potential allies. It's a pretty straightforward mission: get in, make contact, do some diplomacy, get out. Questions or concerns?

DOVAN: I've got a couple of questions, Captain.

First, if I know Starfleet, they've run at least three hundred simulations of this mission before sending us on it. Not that I put too much trust in the brass hats, but, according to them, what are our odds of success? And, more importantly, given that the first two missions to Valandria ended in weapons fire, what are the odds we end up in a combat situation?

CORTEZ: Given the Valandrian inclination to violence, there's almost a one hundred percent chance of combat. It's *lethal* combat that we wish to avoid. Lieutenant Rol, I want all of our weapons set to disable, not destroy. I don't want to use torpedoes unless we run out of other options, so warm up the phasers.

ROL: Aye, sir.

CORTEZ: Starfleet is remaining conservative on our odds of success. While our primary mission objective is simply to establish diplomatic contact, there's not much middle ground in the field of Valandrian diplomacy. In the final analysis, it's just too hard to predict.

DOVAN: Thank you. Second: worst-case scenario, I assume, is that we somehow manage to start a war with these people. What does that do to Task Force 38's long-term operations around the Delta Gateway?

CORTEZ: High-minded curiosity, Mr. Dovan, or are you planning to set off an intergalactic incident?

DOVAN: Only the former, I'm afraid. What I mean is, just how strategically critical is Valandria, and how much do we stand to lose?

CORTEZ: Their position is strategically beneficial, but hardly a necessity. If things were to turn hostile, Valandria is far enough away from the Gateway that, at their level of technology, they'd hardly pose a critical threat; however, gaining an enemy on our doorstep is not what we're trying to accomplish here.

DOVAN: Finally, what is the absolute worst insult you can say to a Valandrian?

[SFX: some chuckles]

DOVAN: Just my high-minded curiosity again.

CORTEZ: You are planning to start a war, aren't you? Next question.

HELDER: This mission seems like a bit of a milk run, doesn't it? I mean, we're a Sovereign-class starship, and we're on third contact duty? Although I suppose it could be fun... what do we know about their women?

ROL: They're lizards...

CORTEZ: You realize that Valandrian women are as cold-blooded as the Gorn... and would certainly tear off the head of any male impertinent enough to proposition one of them.

HUNTER: A point I'd like to expand on, Captain, if I may...?

Thank you. I have prepared a brief that I will download to each department head. I think it would be wise to read it. One of the reasons that I've been assigned to this ship is in order for me to assist with the negotiations. I can advise only, however, since the Valandrin will refuse to discuss anything with an... inferior... such as my own male self.

DOVAN: Speak when spoken to for us men, then?

CORTEZ: Exactly.

The *Excelsior* is one of the most advanced ships in the fleet, and one hell of a show of strength to the Valandrin leadership. Diplomacy is all small steps, of course, and *our* first step will be getting them to accept us and allow us to meet with them. I gather they have never been particularly interested in outside species, so that will be half the battle... And I mean that proverbially. I hope.

If that's all, then dismissed. Let's get this ship into its natural habitat: open space.

[SFX: All stand]

DOVAN: Oh! Ah... Before you all go back to being cogs in the machine, I'd like to invite you all to a game of Kadis-kot. My quarters, twenty-one hundred tomorrow night.

As long as you're not on duty, that is. Now that we're in the Delta Quadrant Defense Force, it seems appropriate to play a Nygean game, wouldn't you say?

[silence]

DOVAN: (a little desperately) I can cook Nygean, too.

HUNTER: I'm sure it will be a most... enlightening experience. I'll join you, I think.

LORHROK: (why not?) Count me in, Commander.

ROL: (sigh) I will decline. I do not play games.

[SFX: Rol exits]

SHARP: Wow. What was that? Excuse me. Oh, and, yes, I'll be there.

[SFX: Sharp exits]

DOVAN: ... well, that's enough to run the game, so, anyone else who wants to show up, feel free.

SCENE 100-10

LOCATION: Engineering

LORHROK: Set intermix ratio to one-point-zero! Prepare to initialize the warp chamber on my mark!

LOCATION: Bridge

[SFX: Cortez enters]

DOVAN: Good morning, Captain.

[SFX: Cortez takes her seat]

CORTEZ: So it is, Mr. Dovan. So it is.

LOCATION: Engineering

LORHROK: Three! Two! One! Mark!

[SFX: engines start up]

LORHROK: I need fifty percent capacity now, and gradually — *gradually!*— bring her up to one hundred! Crewman! Get that magnetic constrictor aligned in the next ten seconds, or you will be *personally* informing the captain why we failed pre-launch startup check!

HARKLESS: Yes, sir!

LOCATION: Bridge

STARFLEET EXTRA #3: *This is Starfleet Operations. The Excelsior is cleared for departure. Good journey.*

CORTEZ: Mr. Rol, acknowledge Starbase 911.

ROL: Yes, captain. Starbase 911, we acknowledge and are beginning impulse engine main startup sequence.

LOCATION: Engineering

LORHROK: You three: good work on the dilithium chamber. Monitor it for the *slightest* misalignment as we pass warp one. *Excelsior* hasn't gone over light speed in three years; if we have errors, they'll come right now. Captain, this is Engineering. You have full power at your discretion.

CORTEZ: Very well, Lieutenant. Prepare to undock.

LOCATION: Bridge

LORHROK: Aye, sir.

CORTEZ: Mr. Helder, switch to internal power, and then... clear all moorings.

HELDER: Aye, captain; clearing moorings.

LOCATION: Excelsior Exterior

[SFX: hundreds of small umbilicals detach]

[SFX: impulse engines rev up]

LOCATION: Bridge

CORTEZ: Aft thrusters full.

HELDER: Answering aft thrusters full, sir.

LOCATION: Engineering

LORHROK: Fire up the backup inertial dampers and engage helm control interlinks!

LOCATION: Excelsior Exterior

[SFX: Impulse engines rev harder and the ship begins to move forward.]

LOCATION: Engineering

LORHROK: We're clear! Full power to impulse!

LOCATION: Bridge

HELDER: We are clear and free to navigate.

DOVAN: Course heading, Captain?

CORTEZ: Set course one-sixty mark two-oh-five, warp three.

HELDER: Course laid in.

CORTEZ: (mildly disapproving) Commander... you're grinning.

DOVAN: (joyful) Am I?

CORTEZ: Mr. Helder... engage.

LOCATION: Excelsior Exterior

[SFX: the *Excelsior* jumps to warp]

LOCATION: Bridge

CORTEZ: Confirm all systems green.

ROL: The board shows all systems green, Captain.

HELDER: ETA to Valandrian system: Seven days, five hours.

CORTEZ: Thank you, Lieutenants. Cortez to Engineering!

[SFX: cheering, clapping in the Engineering background, calming down as the Captain calls and Lorhrok shushes everyone. Finally:]

LORHROK: Lorhrok here, sir.

CORTEZ: Good work, Lieutenant. My compliments to your entire section.

LOCATION: Engineering

[SFX: the cheering redoubles]

LORHROK: Thank you, Captain..

CORTEZ: Cortez out.

THIRIPOP: Sir, all sections have reported in. Warp drive is running smoothly, but we're going to need to adjust the plasma flow conduits to get them exactly right.

LORHROK: No need to worry, Ensign. The captain won't be expecting a perfect run on our first warp jump. She probably won't push us above warp six for a few days. It's not as if we're in any major hurry, is it?

THIRIPOP: No, sir. I suppose not.

LORHROK: Well, then, let's see what this fine ship —

[SFX: the warp core starts pulsing faster]

LORHROK: Ensign T'Kala, verify that we have entered high warp.

[SFX: T'Kala presses buttons]

T'KALA: Verified. Current velocity is warp nine-point-seven-four.

LORHROK: I guess the captain isn't one to hold back, is she?

T'KALA: Indeed not. I shall never understand the human predisposition for piloting vessels at unnecessarily high velocities.

LORHROK: Maybe so, but she is half-Vulcan, you know.

T'KALA: Oh?

LOCATION: Bridge

HELDER: Answering warp nine-point-seven-four. And it looks like Engineering will be ready to give us nine-point-eight by thirteen hundred. New ETA to Valandria: Three days, one hour.

CORTEZ: Very good. Mr. Dovan, I want long-range scans of the area and of the Valandrian system as we approach. But that can wait until the end of your shift.

DOVAN: You're not going to stay?

CORTEZ: My ship just launched, Commander. I'm going to the Delta Lounge to commemorate the occasion.

SCENE 100-11

LOCATION: Excelsior Exterior

[SFX: the Excelsior flies by]

DOVAN: *First Officer's Log, Stardate 59935.7. Now that I'm X.O., I've really got to get into the habit of making these. It's been two days since we left Starbase 911; two days since passing through the Iconian Gateway; two days we've been in the Delta Quadrant. And, really, what I'm mostly feeling is... surprise. I... I always expected the D.Q. to feel different somehow, perhaps a bit more vibrant, a bit sharper color than before. But what it really is is liberating. I spent my first seventeen years in Starfleet moving from one battle group to another... here, there isn't a political boundary — or a warfront — for as far as the eye can see.*

Deep down, I guess I was waiting for the Borg to drop on top of Starbase 900 the moment we got on this side of the Gateway. Despite my demand to serve out here on the frontier, I was still thinking like a soldier. Instead, the most action I've seen was the explosion of an EPS conduit yesterday due to phaser feedback. And today? Well, today, all I have to do is get the Assistant Chief Science Officer to show up for duty and do the scans Captain Cortez wants.

LOCATION: Corridor

DOVAN: Computer, is Chief Petty Officer P'chk'ro'ta still in his quarters?

COMPUTER: Affirmative.

DOVAN: Then why isn't he answering his door? Unless, of course, he's *sleeping*.

COMPUTER: Unkmown.

DOVAN: Computer, give me a security override on this thing. Authorization Dovan-quattuor-septem.

[SFX: The door unlocks. Dovan enters.]

DOVAN: What the...?

NARRATOR: Chief Petty Officer Arden P'chk'ro'ta's quarters were somewhat eccentric. For starters, they were fairly dark.

DOVAN: Computer, lights!

COMPUTER: That operation is not permitted.

DOVAN: What? I'm the first officer!

COMPUTER: That operation is not permitted.

NARRATOR: Beyond the gloom, it was a very strange room. Yes, there was a door. Windows, as well, although seeing out them was rather difficult. The construction and furnishing, too, was quite generic — although darkened to only 5% standard lighting. The major sticking point was that, all around the room, in odd places, like windows, or corners, ceilings, mantles, in front of windows, on the edges of desks, or on chairs... there were computer monitors. Alcar could only assume that the large dark shapes strewn equally randomly around the room were hardware components. The monitors, though, were the real eye-catchers, not only because they were the only things in the room that were well-lit enough for Dovan to see them. They were all in different sizes, some relatively small, some bordering on huge, but every one of them showed data — information, unsorted and infinite — streaming across at near-incomprehensible speed. Some were formatted according to Starfleet LCARS protocols, others with a strange, rippling, pale-blue operating format that seemed designed for exactly this kind of work, and others with scripts from a half-dozen other familiar and unfamiliar empires:

Klingon, Romulan, Bajoran... and others. The screens were constantly changing, reorganizing to accommodate new formats.

DOVAN: (muttering) Like I said, weird room.

NARRATOR: While Dovan was still taking all this in, a tall silhouette rose from in front of one of the hardware components near the windows. The figure removed something from the sides of its head, then stepped towards Dovan.

P'CHK'RO'TA: I'm sorry, Alcar; did you ring for me?

NARRATOR: Into the light stepped a long, bony creature, with a feline — even feral — and completely hairless face, and long, slender ears that looked three times longer and ten times sharper than a Vulcan's. A Nuncian, in the flesh. Around his neck... was a pair of standard-issue Engineering earmuffs.

DOVAN: Excuse me, Chief Petty Officer?

P'CHK'RO'TA: I don't understand, Alcar. Did you or didn't you ring for me? Also, you may call me Arden.

DOVAN: (astonished) Mr. P'chk'ro'ta, are you aware of Starfleet rank protocols?

P'CHK'RO'TA: Would you care to sit down? I've always thought some Starfleet rules to be... mindlessly restrictive.

[SFX: Ro'ta replicates something and begins to walk back]

P'CHK'RO'TA: I'd hoped, knowing your attitude, that you would share some of my views.

The drink is for you.

[SFX: Dovan stirs the freshly-replicated cup with his spoon and smells it]

DOVAN: *Irinello!* This is... They could never get this for me on Gault! How did you know?

DOVAN: (takes a long sip) Mmmmm...

And what exactly do you know about my attitude?

P'CHK'RO'TA: (quoting) "Sometimes I think that, between their pointless and rather irritating episodes of senseless, violent rage, the Klingons are really on to something. For one, their leaders kill bureaucrats whenever they get the chance. Ours increase their funding."

DOVAN: Excuse me?

NARRATOR: Chief P'chk'ro'ta's words were quoted directly from Dovan's private personnel file — a flagrant breach of ship security.

P'CHK'RO'TA: "I realized that I had to get back to my Career Path of Being On Starships When They Explode... That's why medals should be abolished: they tell people like Inspector #98 that people like me--"

DOVAN: That's enough.

Okay, Arden, you may have a point. Maybe I *am* letting this new responsibility dampen my fun-loving, free-wheeling sense of rebellion a little too much. Call me Alcar.

P'CHK'RO'TA: A characteristically speedy change of heart, Alcar.

DOVAN: That brings me to my next point... Arden. To be blunt: how the devil do you have access to my personnel file?

[SFX: Ro'ta stands and walks to the window]

P'CHK'RO'TA: Come on over here.

[SFX: Ro'ta presses weird and exotic alien computer buttons — and some familiar ones from several empires]

P'CHK'RO'TA: I'm sorry I didn't hear you at first; these workstations can, if faulty, can generate a soundwave quite capable of damaging me. I needed the ear coverings as a precaution.

DOVAN: And why weren't you in one of the science labs, working on the scans the captain asked for?

P'CHK'RO'TA: I was. From here.

[SFX: computer boop]

P'CHK'RO'TA: As you can see, we're still having some issues extending the *Excelsior's* sensor net far enough to scan the Valandrian system.

DOVAN: I can also see that that schematic of our sensor department is supposed to be protected from access by other crewmembers through several layers of security. But I'll let that go; do go on.

P'CHK'RO'TA: So, since I can't get the scans using our net, instead I have these.

[SFX: he hands Dovan a padd. Dovan scrolls through it.]

DOVAN: This — Chief, this is short-range scan data. We're still a out of long-range distance. How did you — ?

P'CHK'RO'TA: Really, Alcar, you've got bigger problems than figuring out the Nuncian way of life.

DOVAN: Do I sense another quote from my autobiography coming on?

P'CHK'RO'TA: Quite the contrary, my friend. For the last three minutes, there's been an unidentified intruder moving in the direction of the Computer Core. He's been somehow shielding himself from the ship's internal sensors, but it is somewhat more difficult to avoid my scans.

DOVAN: (stunned) What? And you were going to notify the captain when?

P'CHK'RO'TA: When I had learned all I could.

DOVAN: (sighs) Arden, you and me are gonna have a talk later. Dovan to Amara!

AMARA: Amara here.

DOVAN: I know you're not one for Kadis-kot, Lieutenant, but I've got another game offer for you.

AMARA: (rolling his eyes) Yes, sir?

DOVAN: It's called, Catch The Intruder Who's Crawling Through A Jefferies Tube On The Way To The Computer Core. Want to play?

[SFX: a red alert klaxon goes off]

COMPUTER: Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert!

AMARA: Yes, sir!

DOVAN: Glad to hear it, Lieutenant. Let's go. Dovan out.

[SFX: Dovan goes to the door, then turns after it opens to talk to Ro'ta]

DOVAN: Get that PADD with the scans to the captain, despite what's on it. Don't wait to learn everything next time. And please don't call her by her first name.

Any last words of wisdom for me, Arden?

P'CHK'RO'TA: Yes. Don't ever again use the Kolrami Grand Opening move like you usually do in Kadis-kot. Melissa Sharp is far too intelligent to fall for it.

DOVAN: (uneasy) Okay. Thanks.

SCENE 100-12

LOCATION: Jefferies Tube

[SFX: Leo Amara climbs down an access ladder and opens a Jefferies Hatch, shining his palm beacon into the tube. He pulls out his tricorder, does a scan, and closes it. He then climbs into the tube.]

ROL: Rol to Amara. Access Sixteen-alpha is clear, moving to Bravo.

AMARA: Don't forget to seal the hatch behind you. Meet up with Michaels at Charlie and then move across to Seventeen. I'll meet you at Twenty.

ROL: The intruder has to be somewhere along here. Now that we've sealed the section, there should be no way out.

AMARA: Then stop talking and they won't hear you coming.

ROL: *Aye, sir.*

[SFX: Amara comes through the end of the tube and pulls out his tricorder again, running another partial scan, during which he is interrupted, leaving the tricorder open.]

ROL: Rol to Amara!

AMARA: What now?

ROL: Sir, we just cleared 16-Charlie and Michaels saw something. He's circling around and I am following.

AMARA: Take it slow; there's nowhere to go now except to me, so just keep moving carefully.

[SFX: Amara turns and taps in an override to one of the hatches, which clicks to unlocked, allowing Leo to open it. He climbs in, drawing his phaser in the process. Crouching there, breathing heavily, he soon hears a rattle of something hurrying down the tube.]

INTRUDER: (breathing heavily)

AMARA: Stop right there!

[SFX: Amara levels his phaser down the tube. The person keeps moving, causing further rattle. Leo begins pursuit and fires his phaser once in a warning shot down near the figure's head.]

AMARA: Stop! I won't ask again!

[SFX: suddenly, the movement stops]

AMARA: Alright, I'll take that as a surrender. Now, let's have a look at — you?

What are you doing here?

ROL: (shouting down the tube) Did you get him?

AMARA: (shouting back) I'm not really sure what I've got yet! It's a human boy!

ROL: It's a kid?

AMARA: (dry) As I said. The question is, why is a child in the Jefferies Tubes? [to Simon] Do you have anything to say for yourself?

Cancel the alert; I'll take him to sickbay. Maybe the Doctor can get something out of him.

SCENE 100-13

LOCATION: Sickbay

SHARP: Well, by all my scans, the boy is perfectly healthy. He just isn't *talking*. At all.

AMARA: No idea who he is?

SHARP: None.

AMARA: Computer, identify the child in sickbay.

COMPUTER: Unknown.

AMARA: Computer, what is the current crew and passenger manifest for the *USS Excelsior*?

COMPUTER: Nine hundred and ninety-one.

SHARP: Computer, how many persons currently aboard the *USS Excelsior*?

COMPUTER: *Nine hundred and ninety-two.*

SHARP: A stowaway?

[SFX: Cortez enters.]

AMARA: I just don't see how he got aboard and avoided detection. There are internal scans designed to check for stowaways before and after we leave port.

[SFX: Cortez walks up.]

CORTEZ: Obviously they need updating, Ensign. Now, what have we here?

AMARA: He's not talking.

CORTEZ: Anything... else?

SHARP: Well, he's human, approximately sixteen years old and in generally good health except for a little malnutrition and dehydration.

[pause]

CORTEZ: You're Simon, aren't you?

AMARA: Excuse me, sir?

CORTEZ: Simon Westlake.

WESTLAKE: (reluctantly) Yes, ma'am.

AMARA: Captain...?

CORTEZ: He's been missing for about eight months. He's Commodore Westlake's son.

AMARA: I remember that... How'd he get aboard the *Excelsior* way out at Starbase 911?

WESTLAKE: (quietly) From the *Austin*.

AMARA: The U.S.S. *Austin* transported supplies to Starbase 911 and we got about half a bay of medical and ration supplies from them.

WESTLAKE: I was getting some ration packs and I ended up here.

CORTEZ: The cargo transporter must have scooped you up with the supplies. The bio

alarm was off because some of the supplies were medical test cylinders designed to simulate biological subjects.

AMARA: But how have you managed not to be picked up by our internal sensors?

WESTLAKE: If you know ships, you know where is safe when the sweeps happen.

SHARP: And you know ships?

WESTLAKE: (sadly) I wanted to be an engineer.

CORTEZ: I got the report of your disappearance, but Commodore Westlake never went into details on why. Why did you run away?

WESTLAKE: I wanted to go to the Academy, be like my dad.

SHARP: So why run away?

WESTLAKE: (despondent) Because I can't ever do that.

SHARP: Why not?

WESTLAKE: (quietly) I'm sick.

SHARP: (surprised) Really?

[SFX: Sharp activates the bioscan systems again — more than a routine check this time]

WESTLAKE: My dad said I could never do this. He said I needed to be on Earth... so they could try to... fix me.

AMARA: He said you could never do what, stowaway?

WESTLAKE: (eyes twinkling) Go exploring.

CORTEZ: I see.

SHARP: Captain, if I could have a moment with you...

CORTEZ: Of course.

[SFX: they cross to the far side of the bay]

SHARP: He has a neurological condition called Elarin's Syndrome. Not very common in humans, but it crept in with some alien genetic material in his family line. It's not life threatening until the early twenties. Once it takes hold, however, emotional stress and severe physical strain can cause a breakdown in the of the chemical chains which store memory.

CORTEZ: No wonder his father wanted to keep him out of Starfleet and at home. The stresses the Academy and service put on a person are horrific.

SHARP: Some sufferers have suffered virtually complete memory breakdown. Their lives were, for all intents and purposes, over.

CORTEZ: So why would he run away?

SHARP: You heard him: he wanted adventure. He was too young to do it with his father's blessing, so he decided to do it while he still could.

CORTEZ: (considers) Very well. Thank you, Doctor. Mister Amara, have quarters made up for Simon and assign someone to keep an eye on our little Houdini.

AMARA: Houdini?

SHARP: An entertainer from Earth; he specialised in escaping restraints.

AMARA: I'll assign someone from security.

CORTEZ: And get him cleaned up and fed. I need to get in contact with Commodore Westlake.

[SFX: Lorhrok enters.]

LORHROK: Captain, the report on yesterday's EPS explosion. It seems we made a standard adjustment to the *Excelsior's* new coolant systems during the refit, but, as the first *Sovereign*-class vessel to use that modification, we had no way of knowing that there was a compatibility issue between the coolant relays and the EPS conduit. It wasn't designed to handle the new input. We've patched it, and I'll get the fix uploaded to the Starfleet Corps of Engineers by the time we get back from Valandria.

CORTEZ: Very good, Lieutenant. Will we —

WESTLAKE: Are you an Engineer?

LORHROK: (surprised) Why, yes, I am. The Chief Engineer, as a matter of fact. What's your name?

CORTEZ: (thinking quickly) Lieutenant, this is Simon Westlake, son of the admiral. He'll be accompanying us for the next little while, and he seems to have quite an interest in the Engineering section. Think you could show him around?

LORHROK: Of course, sir. We'll set up an opportunity for that.

CORTEZ: Thank you, Mr. Lorhrok. Dismissed.

[SFX: Lorhrok leaves; Cortez turns to Simon]

CORTEZ: That goes for you, too, young man. Mr. Amara is waiting outside.

WESTLAKE: Yes, captain!

SCENE 100-14

LOCATION: Main Bridge

[SFX: the *Excelsior* drops out of warp]

CORTEZ: Helm, cool down the warp drive and go to maximum impulse. Bring us in on a slow approach towards Valandria. Let them come to us.

HELDER: Aye, captain.

[SFX: Dovan walks across the rear of the bridge]

DOVAN: Red alert.

[SFX: red alert]

CORTEZ: Full scan, active sensors. Let them know we're here.

ROL: Aye, captain. Actively scanning the system.

[SFX: sensor disturbance on Rol's console]

ROL: Captain: three patrol vessels at bearing zero-four-five. They're changing course to intercept... with shields up and weapons charged. Intercept in three minutes!

DOVAN: So much for peace, love, and the Bolian way.

CORTEZ: Let's do this.

[SFX: opens the shipwide intercom]

CORTEZ: All hands, this is the captain. Battlestations. I repeat: all hands to battlestations.