

Star Trek: Excelsior

Season Four: Ex Astris Mirificentia

Episode #5A:

"Better Angels"

by James Heaney

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FIRST DRAFT

5 JUNE 2017

**SCENE 4K-01**

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT (CAPTAIN'S YACHT *MCKINLEY*)

Dovan at the controls. Lorhrok enters the cockpit through one of the Defiant-style doors.

LORHROK  
Magnetic alignment holding steady, sir.

DOVAN  
Good, good. How about you?

LORHROK  
Sir?

DOVAN  
Well, we've been off the ship for ninety-eight hours. Alone. In an uncharted part of the galaxy. How are you feeling?

Lorhrok sits down in the co-pilot's seat and leans back.

LORHROK  
Honestly, after the past few weeks of stellar surveys, I was itching to get off-ship. You'd think that a new region of space would be a bit more... adventurous.

DOVAN  
(grinning)  
What? The Casserole Incident aboard the Relayan convoy wasn't enough for you? I mean, Yubari practically deployed the marines before we worked it out.

LORHROK  
(shrugs)  
Surprisingly psychoactive foodstuffs weren't high on my list of things to discover when I signed up.  
(blink)  
Though, to their credit, once you got past the hallucinations, it was quite good.

DOVAN  
Spoken like a true cosmocosmitan. What did bring you out here, then?

LORHROK

You ordered me to report to the Yacht *McKinley* for two weeks, sir, so... I don't know, why are we here?

DOVAN

Other than charting this lovely diffraction field and surrounding star systems? I wanted to give Commanders Neeva and Yubari a little light command experience, now that they're both fully-qualified. Let them make some stories on their own.

(beat)

Plus, bonding time, I suppose.

LORHROK

(a bit surprised)

Bonding time.

(blink)

I've never really had that before. Father never seemed inclined. What is, ah, involved?

DOVAN

Oh, I picked up an aromatherapy kit from Counsellor Rustwick before we left. We're having circle time in an hour.

LORHROK

(horrified)

Oh, uh, I just remembered, I need to wash [my hair tonight.]

DOVAN

Pfft. No, this is about it. Charting that pre-warp civilization yesterday. Conversation. You souping up my yacht's engines. Not pulling a Chakotay.

LORHROK

I can do that. It has been a long time since we had a decent conversation. What's a Chakotay?

DOVAN

No idea. When I told Admiral Parker I was taking my X.O. on a shuttle run for a couple weeks, he told me not to pull one.

LORHROK

Must be some human idiom.

DOVAN

Why do they always assume every species in the galaxy knows every inane particularity of their ridiculous language?

LORHROK

And then they chuckle at you for not knowing it. Like you're the provincial rube! And then they give you a blank stare everytime you use a saying everybody else knows, like "Great Prophet"—

DOVAN

--or, or, uh, "pebbles on the cliff-face."

LORHROK

Exactly. All of a sudden it's Cultural Anthropology One-Oh-One!

DOVAN

You know, I've heard some humans think they invented the Lords of Kobol?

LORHROK

(rolling his eyes)

Humans.

(chuckling)

Looks like we're off to a good start already.

DOVAN

Bonding time! Although, incidentally, you never answered my question.

LORHROK

Which one?

DOVAN

What brought you out here? I mean, into Starfleet, not into this shuttle.

LORHROK

Oh, well... The War, I suppose.

DOVAN

Ever... regret it?

(beat)

I'm just saying, it doesn't take a certified counsellor to see that this has been a hard year for you.

LORHROK

In some ways. Sir, is this really the time for... this?

DOVAN

We've been out here for four days with nary a beep from the comm panel. I'm not sure there'll be a better [time than we have right now.]

Interrupted.

The comm panel beeps an alert.

LORHROK

Captain, I'm picking up a distress call. It's extremely faint.

DOVAN

(sigh)

Jinxed it. How far?

LORHROK

Not far at all. We're probably almost on top of it. It's this diffraction field; it's playing hell with the transmission bands. Let me try to localize the source...

He starts inputting commands.

DOVAN

Put it up on screen while you do that.

LORHROK

Aye, sir.

Screen pops on.

In the following line, anything in brackets should be fuzzed out by static:

RAYGER TOOG 4K-1

(strained but not panicked)

...[Calling a]ny vessels in range. We have heavy casualties, but the shelling seems to have stopped. Again, this settle[ment is located on] the tip of the largest peninsula of the south-eastern continent. Repeat: the Rayger Toog beg for help, from [any vessels in range.]

The static overwhelms the signal, and it cuts out.

LORHROK

I have a location. Deeper into the field.

DOVAN

We'll just have to make it quick, then. Alter heading and speed.

Lorhrok puts in some commands as Dovan says this, concluding with the telltale "Engage" button being pressed.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle jumps to warp.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT

LORHROK

Coming up on the origin now.

DOVAN

You weren't kidding about being right on top of them. Take us out of warp.

Lorhrok does so, and scans the system as the warp flash fades.

LORHROK

Small star system, six planets. Only the second is inhabited, but I'm showing signs of mining colonies as far out as the fourth world.

DOVAN

The distress call is coming from the second?

LORHROK

Yes. And that's odd. There are some unmanned docking stations in orbit, automated refueling stations... all the signs of early space infrastructure, equivalent to Starfleet's twenty-second century. But no ships, no patrols. It's like there was a fleet here, but they've all left.

DOVAN

Leaving the barn doors wide open for bandits.

LORHROK

Sir?

DOVAN

Sorry. Another human idiom. Forget I said it.

LORHROK

Forgotten and forgiven. Approaching the atmosphere. I'll take us in for a low sensor pass so we can find out what's happening—and who we should contact?—before we land.

DOVAN

My thoughts exactly. Pitch up twenty degrees. That's where the distress call came from.

LORHROK

How do you know? I'm not picking up any locator beacons.

DOVAN

(pointing)

Look. Smoke.

LORHROK

Is that a village?

DOVAN

Lifesigns?

LORHROK

Inconclusive.

DOVAN

Which means there's definitely someone alive down there, but there's either too much interference or they're dying.

LORHROK

Spectral frequencies are saying a little from column A, a little from column B.

DOVAN

This is strange. Why is a village broadcasting an interstellar distress call? Where's the local police force? What happened to the orbital fleet? X.O., try to raise the central government. We need to [get our bearings here.]

We hear a series of laser-like pings on the yacht's hull, followed by an explosion!

LORHROK

We're being fired on!

DOVAN

Number two drive is out! Who's shooting?

LORHROK

Some kind of anti-aircraft unit! We're going down!

DOVAN

I need a landing site!

LORHROK

Keep it steady... there! That clearing!

DOVAN

I've got it! Brace for impact!

KRA-KOOM! The shuttle crashes!



**SCENE 4K-98**

Theme song!

**SCENE 4K-02**

INT. EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

Red alert.

NEEVA

Yes, Captain, I am aware that your main reactor is at ninety percent of critical, but if you don't push it to ninety-five-

ALIEN CAPTAIN #4H-01

That is completely unacceptable! We-

Yubari steps forward and slams her comline open.

YUBARI

Mister Baudette, this is the captain of the *Excelsior*. If you don't push it to ninety-five, then the power transfer fails, and we're all dead. We passed critical ten minutes ago. Do your job! Excelsior out!

(SFX: she slams the intercom again)

God dammit these people are whiny.

NEEVA

That might not be quite the right word. We've already blown out the replicators for the next week, and, if I get this calculation wrong, we'll have to abandon ship. Sylveste, give me an update on-

J'NAYA [over the comm]

Bridge, I hate to be a broken record, but-

YUBARI

Talk less, say more!

J'NAYA [over the comm]

We need more power!

YUBARI

Neeva?

NEEVA

We don't have any more! If you get any, it'll be from the Thanatoksin ships that are holding out!

J'NAYA [over the comm]

But—

NEEVA

That's all I can tell you! Keep trying!

(SFX: this time it's Neeva who hits the intercom to close channel)

Commander, she's right. We need more.

YUBARI

Alright. Sylveste, hail the flagship of the Thanatoksin flotilla.

NEEVA

Eighteenth ship in the network, Sylveste.

SYLVESTE

Yes, ma'ams.

YUBARI

Any suggestions?

NEEVA

The Thanatoksin are avians, right? What do you know about birds? Say something about flocks sticking together. Say anything. Make promises. Make threats. Do whatever it is you need to do, Commander, but do it now.

Sylveste and Neeva press a lot of buttons, but fade down everything a little bit while Yubari's voiceover interrupts:

YUBARI [voiceover]

Acting Captain's Log, supplemental. After an ion wave front ripped through the sector, the *Excelsior* joined relief operations on Divitia, the devastated capital of the Perenalthorias Union. It turns out they thought, "Oh, yeah, we can put a bunch of fusion plants in orbit, they'll be fine as long as we never get hit by an ion wave front."

(blink)

If the relief ships can't maintain containment, those fusion plants will burn up half the planet -- and us along with.

(blink)

Captain Dovan and the *Muztag* are still missing.

SYLVESTE

I have a Shipmaster Jerrin, ma'am. His ship is the *Thir Thoren*.

YUBARI

In my ready room, Ensign.

She exits. Neeva barely skips a beat as Yubari exits. Neeva's line here is cut short [somewhere reasonable] when Yubari enters the ready room:

NEEVA

Ensign! Those Thanatokskin shuttlepods! Why are they drifting out of alignment?

We change perspective, following Yubari.

INT. READY ROOM

YUBARI

Computer, on screen.

(SFX: some guy appears on screen)

Hi! Guess what?

JERRIN

I—

YUBARI

Don't answer that. Your ships're going to a hundred percent.

JERRIN

One hundred percent! You must find some other way! We cannot afford—!

YUBARI

LOOK, Shipmaster! I've just been instructed to offer you compensation for your trouble. You push your reactors to the red line, and we'll... we'll... We'll owe you one!

Blink.

JERRIN

Owe us? One what?

YUBARI

A solid! A favor! You do this for us, and you can ask us for something later! After we get through this without everyone dying because you wouldn't go to one hundred percent!

JERRIN

We can't run our warp reactor on empty promises, Captain!

An alert chimes at Yubari's desk.

YUBARI

Oh, no. Containment Power Plant Epsilon just started to fail. We have to shore it up. *Thir Thoren*, your quota is now one hundred three percent.

JERRIN

I [absolutely refuse! Find someone else!]

Interrupted. Actor, record whole line. Producer, interrupt.

YUBARI

(as if he weren't talking)

And if the next words out of your mouth aren't, "I agree, Captain," your quota's going to be a hundred and five just for all the time you've wasted the relief effort.

JERRIN

I... I agree, Captain, but [we will hold you to the offer of a favor].

Interrupted again. Just like above.

YUBARI

Good. *Excelsior* out.

Yubari stands up and returns to the bridge, where Neeva is midsentence:

NEEVA

[Sylveste, I need the field's new] geometry to compensate for those shuttlepods thirty seconds ago!

SYLVESTE

They're not finished yet, ma'am!

Part of the ceiling explodes, and debris smashes to the deck, punctuating Neeva's point.

NEEVA  
Sylveste...

SYLVESTE  
There! Done!

Yubari sits in the center seat. Neeva is in the X.O.'s seat next to her. Neeva has a timer running down on her armrest. It beeps very slightly every tenth of a second, and more loudly once every full second.

The ship is starting to hum like it's building up to an explosion, everything is shaking a little, loud enough to hear, and every few seconds a console explodes in a shower of sparks.

YUBARI  
Status, Commander?

NEEVA  
The Thanatoksin ships are all giving one hundred two percent, Commander, so that's good, and thank you. What's bad is that we are going to blow up anyway.

YUBARI  
No, we aren't.

NEEVA  
We are... (checks her armpad) seventy-three seconds from a core breach. There's nothing we can do to stop it except turn off the power transfer beam. But if we turn off the beam—

YUBARI  
The reactors fail, and we explode. We're not going to do that.

NEEVA  
But if we don't...

YUBARI  
We aren't going to blow up, Commander.

NEEVA

Renegade Squadron, this is Summit Five Actual. Break off patrol and get to a safe distance.

VESANT [over the comm]

Acknowledged, Summit Five Actual. Moving to a safe distance.

YUBARI

We aren't going to blow up.

Something blows up just above her.

SYLVESTE

Containment still hasn't stabilized on the fusion plants. Should I sound abandon ship, ma'ams?

NEEVA

No point. There isn't enough time for a pod to get beyond [the blast zone.]

Interrupted! Sensor readouts start streaming in to everyone's consoles... good news!

SYLVESTE

Commander! Fusion plant six just re-established shielding!

Almost before Sylveste is finished:

J'NAYA [over the comm]

Bridge, core temperatures are falling! Systems coming back online!

NEEVA

It's stable.

SYLVESTE

Plants four and fifteen are back! Twelve!

NEEVA

(terse, but relieved)

Step down the beam - gradually! Recall the fighters and signal the fleet to begin Stabilization Phase Three.

SYLVESTE  
Yes, ma'am.

NEEVA  
We made it.

YUBARI  
Toldja. The *Excelsior* would never [just blow up like that.]

A big explosion rocks the ship from outside - a shockwave. Yubari, Neeva, and Sylveste are thrown to the floor!

YUBARI and NEEVA and SYLVESTE [ad lib]  
(ad lib)  
Whoa! Whoo! Agh! (etc. etc.)

NEEVA  
What was that?!

SYLVESTE  
Ship number nineteen. A scout ship, part of the Thanatoksin flotilla. It looks like they couldn't handle the power drain we were putting on them, ma'am. She just blew up.

Beat.

NEEVA  
How many people aboard?

SYLVESTE  
Seventeen.

YUBARI  
The reactor! Is the reactor holding?

SYLVESTE  
Uh... [long beat, tension builds] (with palpable rites)  
Yes, ma'am.

NEEVA  
Thank the Lords.

YUBARI  
Good.



NEEVA  
"Good"?

YUBARI  
Better than everyone.

Beat.

Alert on Sylveste's console.

SYLVESTE  
Incoming message from the *Thir Thoren*, ma'am.

NEEVA  
The Thanatoksin, already? I thought the Divitians might want to call and thank us for saving their planet.

SYLVESTE  
Communications with the capital are still disrupted due to yesterday's EMP.

YUBARI  
They're probably just embarrassed about their fusion safety standards being proved wrong. Put the birds on screen.

SYLVESTE  
Aye, ma'am.

The viewscreen switches on.

YUBARI  
Shipmaster Jerrin, I express our deep regret over the loss of one of your flock. The crew of the

She glances at Neeva, who is quick to whisper:

NEEVA  
(whispering)  
*Thal Kray.*

YUBARI  
(smoothly)  
*Thal Kray* gave their lives in the service of others. Our culture believes there is no greater act.

JERRIN

Nor ours, Commander. Yet their loss will be felt deeply by our flotilla and the crew's families for many years to come.

(blink)

We are calling to discuss the "favor" you promised. The "favor" for which the crew of the *Thal Kray* died.

Beat. Yubari is surprised they want to ask about that this soon after the crisis is over. But she recovers.

YUBARI

Yes, of course. It sounds like you already have something in mind.

JERRIN

Perhaps performing this favor will be of benefit to you, as well. I understand that your captain and first officer are missing?

Beat. More surprise. How does he know that?

YUBARI

You're well-informed, Shipmaster. Yes, the captain is six days late to rendezvous with us. We haven't been able to leave to search for him because of the relief operations here, but we're afraid he's become stranded somewhere in the diffraction fields of the Ly'ven'tho Expanse. Unfortunately, our sensors can't read very far inside the field.

JERRIN

Thanatoksia has spent a great deal of time studying the fields, and we have sophisticated observatories on our homeworld dedicated to the purpose. We would be willing to lend you the use of them.

YUBARI

That's very generous of you, Shipmaster. It sounds more like a favor to us than a favor to you.

JERRIN

During this past week, we have observed the *Excelsior's* precision sensors in action. You've saved many lives on Divitia simply by being able to find them. Our observatories have no such capabilities. We invite you to augment them, so you may better find your missing captain... and we ask only that you leave your enhancements in place when you leave.

YUBARI

A sensor upgrade, in exchange for helping us find the captain.

JERRIN

And in payment of the "one" that we are owed.

YUBARI

Of course, of course. Neeva?

NEEVA

Mute channel.

(SFX: "mute channel" beep boop - this is a particular sound from the series and I want to get it)

Well, they're an A-minus on the Scale of Culture, so we can't just roll out the Type-Fifteens, but I'm sure I can get approval for some form of technological exchange.

YUBARI

Call Starfleet Command as soon as we're done here?

NEEVA

Absolutely.

YUBARI

Unmute.

(SFX: "unmute" beep boop)

We have to get final clearance from our government, but we accept your very generous offer, Shipmaster. The United Federation thanks the kind Thanatoksin people.

JERRIN

You may join our convoy. We must return home quickly. We sent so many resources to Divitia. Our neighbors, the Lindalai, left their homeworld almost completely defenseless - as did we. Departure will be in half a local day... as soon as we've buried our dead.

YUBARI

We mourn with you, *Thir Thoren*.

(respectful pause)

*Excelsior* out.

(SFX: the comm line closes)

(SFX: Yubari flops back down in her command seat)

(with a dramatic exhale)

How'd that go? I sound okay?

NEEVA

Yeah, respectful, considerate, the works.

YUBARI

Thank God. Two hundred hours practicing b.s. in the mirror actually paid off.

SYLVESTE

Should I lay in a course for the Thanatoksin homeworld?

NEEVA

Well... we do owe them one.

**SCENE 4K-03**

EXT. WOODS

There's a big explosion, not far away. Trees, sticks, rocks, and squirrel carcasses all go flying as the drone of a spaceplane passes overhead. (Think the Vulcan bombers from Kir'Shara.)

Dovan is half-carrying, half-helping an man who's wounded. His name is Neshent. They are moving as fast as they can. Lorhrok is a litte ahead running a tricorder--still in shouting distance.

NESHENT

(wounded. Physically, not emotionally.)

You don't owe me anything, Dovan! I'm only slowing the rest of you down!

DOVAN

(under some strain because he is carrying Neshent's weight, grunting sometimes)

Oh, come on, that was just a lucky shot. They don't have a clue where we are! Alecz!

Lorhrok drops back.

LORHROK [drawing nearer]

(starts out shouting and then goes to regular voice as he gets closer)

He's right, Neshent! The drones are still in a random search pattern! I'd be amazed if they can see the ground at all through the canopy of this forest.

NESHENT

A forest the Lindalai will murder if it means killing the last Rayger child. You're our best hope, Dovan. Leave me here to die!

DOVAN

(under some strain because he is carrying Neshent's weight, occasional grunting, etc. - keep it up until the script says you put him down)

I'm glad you've made your peace with doom, Neshent, really, but if you die now it means the three days I spent carrying you after you got shot by the Lindalai were for nothing. So, if it's all the same to you, I'm just gonna keep going.

There is a distant explosion. The drones are still bombing, but randomly.

NASHENT

I'm lucky you're such a fool, Dovan.

DOVAN

That makes (grunt of exertion) one of us! Alecz! Is something wrong? Are the children okay?

LORHROK

Yes, they're fine. Yalma wants to know if we can have a campfire tonight.

DOVAN

(smiles)

When doesn't he?

(blink)

Kids. They can forget their village is gone, their own parents maybe dead, because the universe is just so full of wonder. Tell him we can if the next tree-home is ventilated and the drones break off. Just like last night.

(blink)

Anything else?

LORHROK

Actually, I was dropping back to check on you. The children are already in the next tree-home, getting a head start on the mukkaberries.

DOVAN

Thank the Lords. How long's it been since we ate... anything?

LORHROK

For you and me, four days. Not as bad for the kids. But if this weren't the rainy season...

DOVAN

We would have died of thirst a week ago. I know, don't remind me: I hate almost dying.

NESHENT

Well, there should be food aplenty in the Tree-Home... and safe passage through the roots under the river.

Another distant explosion.

DOVAN

(grunt of exertion) Well, where is it?

LORHROK

Right here, captain.

Lorhrok knocks twice on the trunk of a very big tree. It's hollow, so the knock echoes a bit.

Nothing happens, so Neshent struggles forward - dragging Dovan with him.

NESHENT

No, no, you still don't have it. Here, like this.

Now Neshent knocks twice, but with a slightly different rhythm and a bit more heavily in a different place.

Then, the tree bark folds back, less like tree bark and more like a mouth opening, leaving a small, person-sized entrance that leads into the giant tree itself... and, after a short but gentle downward slope, into an underground tunnel formed by the network of the tree's roots.

DOVAN

You have got to tell me how you do that.

NESHENT

I've already told you a dozen times. Just feel the lifeblood of the tree, then knock where it will open.

DOVAN

Yeah, see, that first part is the one I was hoping you'd explain.

NESHENT

The Rayger Toog evolved alongside the tree-homes, Dovan. Our children play in the root-tunnels; our elders die among the canopy-birds. The trees are miraculous to you, yes, but whatever your Bolian intestines did last night at camp was just as miraculous to me.

DOVAN

(rolling his eyes)  
Seriously? That's all you've got? A [poop joke?]

A horrible scream - a child's scream of terror - comes from deeper into the tree, interrupting Dovan.

DOVAN  
(quickly)  
Lords. Neshent, I have to drop you here.

NESHENT  
'course.

While Dovan lets Neshent off his shoulders and puts him down on the ground, Lorhrok offers Neshent his sidearm. This is all cut very quickly; they have to go help that kid.

LORHROK  
Take my phaser.

NESHENT  
You might need it!

Reluctantly, Neshent takes it anyway as Dovan finishes putting him down. Both Dovan and Lorhrok start to move down the tunnel.

LORHROK  
The captain has one!

NESHENT [already being moved away from]  
Good luck!

DOVAN  
C'mon!

But they're already accelerating fast down the corridor. We follow them.

DOVAN  
(heavy breathing while running)

LORHROK  
(heavy breathing while running)



We hear Lindalai voices as we approach. ~~They are flat and robotic, spoken naturally but fed through a voice synthesizer to lose most inflection. It's a scary effect.~~

As we approach, we also hear several children crying, in various stages of terror.

LINDALAI BETA  
Get them against the wall!

LINDALAI #1  
Wait! Do you hear that?

LINDALAI BETA  
Someone's coming. Halt! Who goes AGH!

SFX: Dovan interrupts the Lindalai with a full phaser blast to the gut. The Lindalai crumples to the ground in his heavy plastic-like armor; his voice synthesizer audibly shatters and emits a low buzz for the rest of the scene.

LORHROK  
Kids! Yalma!

DOVAN  
Up against the wall yourself, Lindalai!

LORHROK  
Kids! Are you okay?

They're pretty much beside themselves and, if anything, redouble their crying.

LINDALAI  
Drop your weapon!

DOVAN  
And why would I do that? We both have guns pointed at each other.

LINDALAI  
I'll shoot.

DOVAN

Then I'll shoot. And I'm betting you care about living a lot more than I do.

LINDALAI

(pretty darned evil right here)

Not you.

DOVAN

Huh?

LINDALAI

Her.

Dovan realizes the Lindalai's gun is pointing at the little girl, Lissan.

DOVAN

The little girl.

LORHROK

Her name is Lissan. She is seven years old. A few days ago, she saw her mother and father shot in the back while they fled their village.

LINDALAI

Drop your weapons, or she'll join her parents.

DOVAN

You'd be dead before you hit the floor.

LINDALAI

So would she.

Dovan considers for a moment.

DOVAN

This did not work out for Sorid-Gee, you know.

Another moment, and he realizes he's beaten. He turns off his phaser (SFX) and throws it on the ground (SFX).

DOVAN

Fine. We're your prisoners.

LINDALAI

Hands in the air. Up against the wall.

LORHROK  
It's okay, Lissan.

LINDALAI  
I told you, blueskin, don't try anything! Against the wall!  
Now!

Lissan only cries all the louder.

DOVAN  
(helping her up)  
C'mon, let's get you up.

LINDALAI  
And make that savage stop crying!

LORHROK  
She's seven years old and you killed her family and you  
almost [killed her!]

Interrupted.

LINDALAI  
Shut up!

SFX: The Lindalai hits Lorchrok with his rifle butt, hard. Lorchrok  
falls to the ground.

LORHROK  
(it reealllllly hurts)  
Uhnhf!

The girl cries all the louder. The others have gone silent.

LINDALAI  
Ingrates! All of you! We're giving you a chance to live in  
a civilized society, and all you have are tears!

DOVAN  
Well, if you could stop threatening to kill her every two  
seconds, maybe [you can convince her her dead parents were  
worth it.]

Interrupted.

LINDALAI

Fine!

SFX: His gun fires. The girl's crying stops instantly. There's a silence, and then her body (now with a big hole in it) topples over and hits the floor.

In the horrifying silence, the Lindalai speaks.

LINDALAI

There. I'm not "threatening" anymore, blueskin.

DOVAN

(in shock)

Alecz, is she...?

LORHROK

(in shock)

A shot like that... She wouldn't have felt any pain.

LINDALAI

Stop gawping and get against the wall! Or do you want me to do the boy next, blue-AHG!

He's cut off before he can say "blueskin"... by a phaser!

NESHENT

DEVIL!

Turns out Neshent made it down the corridor - quietly and painfully - until he finally had a clear shot.

The Lindalai topples.

DOVAN

Neshent!

Dovan runs to him.

LORHROK

(to the kids)

Don't look, don't look. This way.

Lorhrok starts to lead the kids away.

DOVAN  
Are you alright?

NESHENT  
(wincing)  
Now that you mention it, I think I broke the leg again.

DOVAN  
Yeah, I see the bone. Let me resplint it.  
(he turns to the roots in the wall behind him, then  
thinks better of it and turns back)  
Does the tree mind?

NESHENT  
(he's got a compound fracture; lots of pain)  
It'll forgive you. The soldier...

DOVAN  
Pretty sure he's dead.

NESHENT  
Better make sure.

DOVAN  
Not really the Starfleet way, Neshent. Here.

SFX: Dovan injects Neshent with a hypospray.

NESHENT  
(the pain is easing)  
So what does the great Starfleet do when the enemy kills  
children?

DOVAN  
(deflecting)  
Come on.  
(sounds of exertion)

NESHENT  
(also sounds of exertion)

SFX: With some effort, Dovan manages to get Neshent standing, with his  
arm wrapped around Dovan's shoulder and leaning dangerously.

DOVAN [voiceover]

Captain's Log, supplemental. I'll never know whether that Lindalai lived. If he did, I'll never know what he became— was he always a monster?

(blink)

All I know is that I'll always be grateful to Neshent. Him telling me to vaporize that man as he lay there defenseless... was the only reason I didn't.

## SCENE

EXT. OUTSIDE THE AVIARY

Neeva and an away team beam down. The away team consists of Doctor Sharp, Commander J'naya and an engineering team, and two security officers. Shipmaster Jerrin is there to greet them.

We are in a high place, on a large platform attached to a tower that rises above the trees. Wind sweeps across the platform. We hear occasional birds and things of that sort - we are not THAT high above the trees.

JERRIN (walking toward them)

Welcome, my friends. Welcome to the Aviary.

NEEVA

Thank you, Shipmaster. It's good to see a friendly face. May I introduce our chief engineer, Commander J'naya, and our surgeon, Doctor Sharp?

J'NAYA

(shaking hands)

I'm looking forward to seeing these observatories of yours.

SHARP

(shaking hands)

A pleasure once again, Shipmaster. Love the view from up here.

JERRIN

And may I introduce Strategos Synoll, commander of all our ground forces.

SHARP

Ground forces? I thought you were in the Perenalthorias federation?

SYNOLL

We are. But we do not trust the Lindalai, our neighbors, to leave it at that.

JERRIN

And, of course, there are the Fooora.

SYNOLL

(scoffing)

Those terrorists will be finished within the year. Now that I finally have discretion to root them out of their hidey-holes...

JERRIN

"A mother is always most dangerous in her nest," Strategos. But we bore our guests with politics.

SYNOLL

So we do. Won't you come inside, Commander Neeva? Doctor Sharp, I'll show you to the patient we need examined.

SHARP

Happy to help.

He walks toward a door leading into the tower; everyone follows.

A huuuuuge bird passes by low overhead, flapping its massive wings as it lets out a call.

J'NAYA

Janey Mac!

SYNOLL

Commander? Is something wrong?

NEEVA

I think that bird was just a little bigger than we're used to.

SYNOLL

Ah. That was a *Thir Tollek*, one of the Middle Brothers. By comparison, they're not as large as you think.

SHARP

In comparison to what? A fighter craft?

JERRIN

The Big Brothers.

NEEVA

(whistles admiringly)



Cynoll reaches a door and flashes an ID card at it. It beeps and unlocks, so he can open it. Which he does.

SYNOLL

In here, please. This is the first security checkpoint.

NEEVA

The first? Are there more?

SYNOLL

These are troubled times, Commander, and we are taking you into the very heart of this base.

JERRIN

(wincing)

Seven, Commander. The answer is seven more.

NEEVA

Oh, boy.

## SCENE

INT. A TREEHOUSE

Literally, Dovan and Neshent are in a room carved out of a massive tree trunk. There is an entire village living in this tree and a couple of neighboring trees. The general feel of the place is a bit like a hobbit-hole from the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

Neshent is laying on a bed stuffed with leaves; Dovan is pacing back and forth.

DOVAN

It's been ages. He should be back by now.

NESHENT

(lying a little)

It's... fine, captain. The pain is much less now that I've been given food and a bed.

DOVAN

That splint's a lot better than anything I made you, either. Sorry about that.

NESHENT

The children will be even better taken care of.

DOVAN

Why?

NESHENT

They are young enough to be adopted. I am a man without a village.

Before Dovan can ask any follow-up questions, the wooden door swings open and Lorhrok steps in. We're high up, and can hear the wind rustling the leaves while the door is open.

LORHROK

Sorry it took so long, but I found them. They're in the village nursery, asleep.

DOVAN

Asleep.

LORHROK

I suppose life does go on.

NESHENT  
Not for Lissan.

Beat.

LORHROK  
No, not for Lissan. I... did take a little extra time on the way back, Captain, to find out more about the Rayger Toog - what they're like, how they ended up at war with the Lindalai.

DOVAN  
Good idea.

LORHROK  
The Rayger Toog are I - do you mind, Neshent?

NESHENT  
Oh, no, go right ahead. It'll be fun hearing my people described by aliens.

LORHROK  
Well. The Toog were hunter-gatherers until quite recently. It's visible in everything: their architecture, their daily routines, their etiquette.

NESHENT  
We still hunt the stag and gather the berries of the *Elpam* tree.

LORHROK  
Yes, and that's important to how you see yourselves. But the actual hunting and gathering is no longer part of your fundamental social structure. The Toog are a scavenger race, captain, and have been for at least a full generation.

NESHENT  
That's absurd. Our ways have been unchanged for generations. The technology we gather is a necessary evil, hidden out of sight so as not to disrupt the life of the village.

LORHROK

By my estimate, Captain, at least a third of the village is directly employed in using or maintaining the communication and military equipment housed here. I don't know what it was like in your village, Neshent.

(blink)

Here, I'm seeing everything from radio and pneumatic tubes to transtators and primitive multitronics. Most of it with a label on the back saying "Made in Divitia."

DOVAN

Divitia. That's the capital of the Perenalthorias Union, isn't it? The *Excelsior* was headed that direction for first contact exercises.

Who the HELL do you think you are?! MARK JAMESON?

If I hadn't given them those weapons, you'd be dead.

And the Prime Directive would be intact. I swore an OATH, captain, and so did everyone on that Away Team - to give our lives before we interfered. Have you heard of it, or did you skip that day at the Academy?

And what about the Rayger Toog? Did THEY swear an oath, too, or are you just willing to sacrifice them on the altar of your martyrdom?

You think the Toog are saints? You think they won't commit atrocities right back at the Lindalai? I'm not the one with blood on his hands, here!

Kirk did this! Captain James T. Kirk - heard of him, or did you skip that day at the Academy? Planet Neural. The Klingons were supplying weapons to a native tribe. Kirk countered by supplying weapons of his own. The balance of power had to be maintained.

And how'd that work out for him? Do you know what happened to Neural? The Klingons upgraded their weapons, and so did we. Onward and onward, faster and faster. In twenty-five years, [basically they fought WWI, WWII, and the Napoleonic Wars all in quick succession, with devastating effect)

0. "We're not licensed for that!" "Do you think the Divitians care what they said in some contract? You're trying to save all their lives! So SAVE THEM!"

1. Dovan's shuttle is burned out of the sky, not shot down. Not sure if they were attacked, but in fact nobody is nearby (again, everybody is at Divitia, jockeying to earn more license years free).

2. They crash in a small town "Up North". This violates several Starfleet policies on shuttle crashing, including two specifically addressed to Chakotay.

3. Two weeks later, they're still fleeing the skyfires when they come across the pathetic contingent of firefighters the Lindalai sent.

4. The Man becomes a western-style sheriff in big cowboy boots that clink when he walks.

5. They decide to prove that the Lindalai ships are the cause of the fires by infiltrating the Dol Barad.