

Star Trek: Excelsior

Season Five

Script Pitch 1 - First Draft

by Alexandra Whitley

Summary

Lorhrok receives secret messages left by Rol in case of a Borg threat. But the threat is not assimilation: the Borg have recognized that the Federation, dead or alive, poses a problem only in its potential to unify enemies in a common cause, and that the best way to resolve that problem is to undermine the Federation's democratic process. The Excelsior crew must choose what moral compromises they will make to infiltrate the Borg hacking system and frame the Zero. However, even with election tampering eliminated, a populist demagogue who mobilizes fear sparked by the evacuation of the core worlds wins the presidential election, which takes the crew's relationships in unexpected directions.

A Note on Politics

This episode touches on the populism and ethno-nationalism that have swept Western democracies in the last decade, and on the fragility of democratic process in an information age.

The script aims to depict these issues as larger than the party politics of any specific country. Let's see if we can tackle the topics without making it all about Trump, and let's differentiate between far-right populism and conservatism. The relationships of our characters take the center, and ideally they arouse some empathy for people on different sides of the spectrum in today's world.

The populist candidate is intentionally far removed from Trump in expression and diction. As the script goes through revisions, it is important to avoid cheap shots: no "make the Federation great again."

In theory, the space adventure prompted by a note from beyond Rol's grave could be riven from the political plot, and I would be willing to work on the script in that form if you just don't see Excelsior going the places this script takes it. But I hope you do see the potential here. Even entirely absent the current real-world politics, giving the story a more opportunistic president than the one who ordered the evacuation of the core worlds sets us up for narrative opportunities down the line.

Outline

Scene 01 - Delta Lounge

News broadcasts set the stage for the Federation presidential election and for convivial dynamics among the crew. An “Earth first” populist is running against the successor of the president who ordered the evacuation of the core worlds. Romulus has just been destroyed, and the populist candidate will only admit refugees who submit to a Romulan mind probe.

Scene 02 - Lohrok's Quarters

Lohrok receives the first of a sequence of messages left by Rol before his death with a strategy for certain dire possibilities.

Scene XX - Intro Sequence

Scene 03 - Briefing Room

Outline of a Borg plan to undermine the Federation's role as a unifier and peacemaker by bending its democratic process to their interests, and of the Excelsior's objective to infiltrate the system and frame the Zero so that the Borg abandon the project.

Scene 04 - Cargo Bay 4

Lohrok and Neeva discover a cloaking/phasing device mentioned in Rol's messages

Scene 05 - Main Engineering

J'Naya and Adau install the cloaking device; Adau reveals sympathies toward a reinvigorated Terra Prime movement

Scene 06 - Excelsior Bridge

Exposition of mission details. The crew will need to extrapolate the location of a hacking Borg unimatrix from an uncrewed Borg beacon, then drop marine squads into three locations of the unimatrix in order to introduce apparently Zero-friendly code into the system.

The Excelsior phases and enters Borg space. Dovan maintains the Excelsior's stealth by refraining from rescuing a helpless vessel from assimilation; Sharp protests.

Scene 07 - Turbolift & Hallway from Bridge to Sickbay

Sharp and Yubari have a heart-to-heart while Yubari escorts Sharp from the bridge.

Scene 08 - Main Engineering

The Excelsior arrives at the beacon.

Scene 09 - Borg Broadcast Beacon

The Major and Neeva delve to the core of the beacon in order to track the unimatrix responsible for hacking Federation systems, only to find two Zero already there with the same objective.

One expresses annoyance at losing a host he's only enjoyed for a month. Neeva provokes them into uncloaking their starship, which results in its destruction by the beacon, and the Major

shoots them both. One host dies with the queen still alive inside, and the newer host and her parasite both survive. Our crew take the bodies and the Zero infiltration software they were carrying.

Scene 10 - Sickbay

Melissa Sharp removes the Zero to save the host. She is a Vidiian who gave herself willingly to the Zero when her species began to succumb to the Phage. Lorhrok receives a new message from Rol that this was a foreseen eventuality, and that the Excelsior will need to assist the real Zero infiltration rather than frame them for a false one. The Major agrees to ingest the parasite so that the Borg pick up signatures of the telepathic link between parasite and queen.

Scene 11 - Excelsior Bridge

The Excelsior cruises very slowly through space thick both with Borg ships and Zero vessels, which appear to have been Kazon. Both sides have advantages in waging a war of position and do not fire on each other.

Scene 12 - Excelsior Bridge and multiple locations on the unimatrix

A long and complex scene. The Excelsior launches shuttles running only on solid propellant onto three key sites of the unimatrix, where boarding parties must insert hacking equipment into nodes without being detected by the Borg, except for the Major's team, which must be detected but not caught. The Excelsior must then about-face to pick up the shuttles.

Lorhrok receives a final message from Rol as these missions unfold, which provides a monologue backdrop to the action-driven sequences.

Scene 13 - Excelsior Bridge

The Borg ships open fire on the Zero. A small skirmish for the two far outpaces any Federation battle in history. The Excelsior must escape while phased and moving with minimal speed and maneuverability.

Penultimate Scene - [We need a scene of falling action, but I'm not sure if it should be a short exchange of dialogue leading into the final scene or a longer exchange between characters less prominent in that scene]

Final Scene - Delta Lounge

The ethno-populist candidate wins the election despite the elimination of Borg interference. Her supporters, including the Major and a vocal Adu, drown the Delta Lounge with chants of "Earth First!"

Scene 01

INT. Delta Lounge

[News broadcasts play under the dialogue of the following dialogue. I'm inclined to think they should contain a lot of subtle humor for Trek fans.]

NEEVA

I like your attitude, Adow! Get this woman a drink. A real one, please and thank you.

ADOW

I've never been a fan of command officers or the color green, but I never turn down an ale.

DOVAN

It's been too long since the being who looks like Captain Dovan has gotten a drink with the beings who look like his crew like this.

LORHROK

The being who looks like your first officer agrees.

SHARP

It's times when I have this many drinks in me that I almost think the being who looks like--the Alcar--the Alcar-being--looks good.

J'NAYA

What now?

SHARP

Nevermind. How are things with you and... and... what's his name?

J'NAYA

(laughs)

You'll have to ask him!

YUBARI

Is it just me, or can this crew not hold its liquor?

MAJOR

It's not just you, ma'am.

YUBARI

I think you're holding it a little *too* well, Major!

MAJOR
Someone has to, ma'am.

YUBARI
I'm glad we started this, though. This far into the Delta Quadrant, we only get monthly news from the Federation. Hearing about home feels better with a friend and a drink.

SHARP
Asuka-chan, let's arm wrestle!

NEEVA
She has bionic arms. What are you thinking, Melissa?

SHARP
I'm thinking Asuka will let me push against her hand and see if I can budge it.

YUBARI
(laughs)
Why not?

ADOW
One... two... three!

SHARP
(grunting and straining)

YUBARI
(giggles)

LORHROK
I don't think that standing and pushing with both arms while bracing your legs against the table is how you arm wrestle, Melissa.

We hear a resounding thwack of Yubari's arm hitting the table.

SHARP
I didn't hurt you, did I?

YUBARI
(joking in good humor)
Oh! Ow! The doctor just put me in sickbay!

J'NAYA

Three cheers for the best Federation crew this side of the galaxy! Hip hip--

ANNOUNCER

(“and now” should run under J’naya’s “hip hip.” It doesn’t interrupt her phrase, but it catches enough attention that she pauses and doesn’t finish her hooray)

...And now a statement from the President of the United Federation of Planets.

DOVAN

Hang on. Quiet everyone. This sounds important.

PRESIDENT QVELB

(The president is a Gorn male who rose from Vice President when the former President resigned. The voice acting should not hiss or otherwise attempt to sound reptilian. He speaks through the universal translator, which accurately translates his erratic speaking style. He’s not very articulate.)

Federation citizens. As you know, the destruction of Romulus is confirmed. Romulus is in ruins. The subspace wake of a supernova has devastated the seat of the Romulan Star Empire. The Federation opens its arms to refugees from the disaster. We ask that the Klingons, Cardassians, and others do the same. We should all join hands. Join hands in welcome. Two centuries of hostilities end now. We can stop being afraid. Colonies near the Romulan Neutral Zone will receive instructions. Former Romulan Neutral Zone. They will be instructions for a very effective plan. That is all.

ANNOUNCER

And now, as mandated during election week, a statement from the top-polling opposition candidate.

PENA

To the people of Earth and those beyond, have you forgotten when the Federation began planetary-scale evacuations with no explanation, only to share intelligence afterward about a Romulan invasion that never occurred? Do you remember when the President resigned, only for her Gorn Vice President to take office with no repudiation of her policies or cowardice? This administration had the entire Federation turn tail at the slightest breath of Romulan incursion, and now would let them invade our borders? I say no. I say let the Federation stand tall. Do not give refuge to those who would harm us. Any Romulans who we might consider allowing over our border should first submit to a Romulan mind probe. I speak to you from Earth, capital of the Federation; let Earth stand for the Federation. For too long, our presidents have refused to put Earth first. I promise you today, I will put you first. I will put (blink) *Earth first*.

A pause for a moment as the Delta Lounge is unusually still.

ADOW

Well, it's about time!

SHARP

Wait, *what?*

LORHROK

It's absurd. The Federation doesn't torture.

DOVAN

She's just saying it to rile people up.

MAJOR

Personally, I think it's a reasonable precaution.

YUBARI

It would happen on the Romulan side of the border. Federation law isn't applicable.

SHARP

(sad and surprised)

Asuka...

NEEVA

Politics. I think our night just got a little less fun.

LORHROK

So do I. I'm going to bed.

DOVAN

Wish I could also, but I have a night shift. Thank goodness for that old Bolian liver.

NEEVA

I'm going to make sure nothing gets unpleasant in here.

DOVAN

Thanks for that.

(We hear the doors opening for Dovan and Lorchrok.)

But I don't think we have much to worry about. Goodnight, Lorchrok. Remember that I don't want my first officer hungover in the morning.

LORHROK

(gamely)

We wouldn't want those gaseous anomalies to catch us flat-footed, sir.

Their footsteps go in opposite directions and fade off.

Scene 02

INT. EXCELSIOR (LORHROK'S QUARTERS)

A chime, as if a doorbell, interrupts Lorchrok's sleep.

LORHROK
(yawns)

The chime sounds again.

LORHROK
(grumbles incoherently, and his covers rustle)

ROL'S VOICE
Alec.

LORHROK
(Sudden shuffling of covers as Lorchrok wakes with a start.)
Bev?! Bev. What's--?

We hear a few beeps as Lorchrok blearily makes sense of what has appeared on the display panel by his bed.

LORHROK
It's an encrypted message of some kind. From... Bev. Stardate [xxxx.x]. That's just before our mission to obtain the mapstone. Just before...
(beat, then a deep breath before he begins reading)
"Alec, if you are reading this, I am gone. After the fall of the Han Dynasty on Earth, renowned strategist Zhuge Liang famously left his successor a series of sealed letters foreseeing their enemy's tactics, along with the strategies necessary to survive them. Wheels within wheels within wheels."
(beat)
Bev. I wish you had recorded this. I wish I could hear your voice.
(beat)
"If these letters are appearing, it means that the Sword of Damocles is prepared to cut before it falls, that hidden forces threaten the very core of the Federation. Nevermind how I encoded and triggered these messages. A threat to our democratic process has emerged in the Delta quadrant that only a vessel sent through the Gate--the Excelsior--can resolve. The threat is real, Alec. It's up to you."
(beat)
What comes next requires the decryption algorithms he taught me.
(Some beeping)

Oh my. (blink) Oh my. (blink) Lorhrok to Captain.

DOVAN

Dovan here. Lorhrok, why the hell are you up?

LORHROK

Captain, we need to call the senior staff. Immediately.

Scene 98

Theme song!

Scene 03

INT. Excelsior (Conference room, senior staff briefing)

DOVAN

But are you sure that the message is authentic? Are you sure it isn't someone sending us on a Mintakan goose chase?

YUBARI

As Chief of Security, I second the captain's concerns. I don't like hidden messages or subroutines in our computers, and we can't assume it isn't a hostile force preying on our desire to trust a crew member beyond the grave.

LORHROK

It's Bev, all right. He arranged a series of self-deleting files on what looked like the only means to track how he'd hidden these messages in our system, but which turned out to be an in joke in acronyms and anagrams. But the bottom line is this: a hostile force has plans to manipulate our elections. And that force is... the Borg.

DOVAN

(incredulous)

The Borg?

YUBARI

The *Borg*?

NEEVA

Alec, we all know how much Bevonee meant to you, but--the Borg? The Borg assimilate. People, and before that, technologies. They're not Romulans. They're not known for political infiltration. They don't need to be. If a Cube shows up, you're dead. Why would they need to interfere with elections? And why would they bother with the Federation as a target?

LORHROK

The Borg remain at war with the Zero, and both sides know that overt conquest could rally the galaxy to the other's side. And both sides have recognized what the Federation is: a unifier. It brings together implacable enemies to become allies, and ultimately even friends. It has from the start. The Vulcans and Andorians were at odds for centuries before the Humans reconciled them in just a few years. The Klingons were enemies for decades, and now have been our fastest allies for longer than that. Even if the Borg *or* the Zero destroyed us, our remnants would rally the galaxy like no other power in the Alpha Quadrant ever could.

SHARP

So if they want to eliminate the threat of galactic unity, their best tactic isn't to kill or assimilate us. It's to undercut our role as unifiers and peacemakers. To cut to the heart of what makes the Federation so unique, and so precious.

YUBARI

And *then* kill or assimilate us.

LORHROK

I suspect that's the idea, yes.

DOVAN

All right, let's say the Borg have an interest in Federation elections. What's their strategy?

LORHROK

Digital infiltration of our news networks, and failing that, direct manipulation of vote counts. No one can manage data like the Borg, not even the Binars. They'll deploy learning algorithms so each individual will see exactly the headlines to shift their opinions in the direction that suits the Borg's interests.

SHARP

That kind of data profiling and manipulation of news was illegalized centuries ago. We have safeguards against it. I should know; I protested during the Dominion War to make sure that pro-war propagandists couldn't touch them. Free elections depend on a free press. Are you saying the Borg can circumvent our safeguards?

LORHROK

Ensign Bev Rol is saying it, at any rate. Apparently the detection of Borg signals running through Federation comms relays is what triggered his messages.

J'NAYA

Can't the Federation address this as an engineering problem, then? Can't we look for intrusions into our data networks with Borg footprints and eliminate them?

LORHROK

Maybe we could. But that's where Bev's wheels within wheels come in. If we show that we can detect and block their interference, they either improve their systems or decide we're problematic enough to destroy after all.

J'NAYA

Well you can't be suggesting a frontal attack on whatever Borg facility is responsible for this nonsense!

LORHROK

No. Even if we somehow could destroy a Borg unimatrix, that would have the same result. This being the Borg, the process is decentralized in any case.

DOVAN

Then what *do* we do, Mr. Lorchrok?

LORHROK

We infiltrate the system and pin it on the Zero.

DOVAN

We *what*?

LORHROK

The only way the Borg will cease this operation is if they believe it's vulnerable to manipulation by their *real* enemy. And the Borg can't know we're involved.

YUBARI

Neither can the Zero.

NEEVA

Lieutenant Yubari, I seem to recall your having raised the Starfleet tactical doctrine regarding the Borg not long ago. Do not engage. How is infiltrating a Borg system any kind of realistic goal?

DOVAN

I take it that Ensign Rol didn't stop at a warning. He gave you a plan?

LORHROK

Yes he did. Evidently it begins by searching cargo bay four.

Scene 04

INT. Excelsior (Cargo Bay 4)

Throughout this scene, an audio broadcast of Pena runs under Lorhrok and Neeva's dialogue. The parts we hear better, when they pause speaking, are included here. The entirety of the speech will be fleshed out according to the timing of their conversation.

PENA

We are going to keep out the Romulan rats. Wherever rats turn up they carry destruction to a planet. They are cunning, cowardly, and cruel. An essential trait of the Romulan is that he always tries to hide his origin when he is among non-Romulans. It takes a keen eye to discern one from a Vulcan.

Context: This is a close paraphrase from a Nazi propaganda video. Pena quotes or paraphrases fascist propaganda frequently. She enjoys that the only people likely to catch her are a few history buffs, whom she can dismiss as loonies looking for absurd parallels if they call her out.

LORHROK

I just can't stop listening. It's stunning.

NEEVA

Evidently you *can* lose your focus in searching this cargo bay. Rol probably thought his arcane clues were clear directions, but I do need my commanding officer's help here.

LORHROK

It's just, I can't believe anyone would take this seriously.

NEEVA

I believe they can. Could you scan this container? I'm not sure what we're looking for.

LORHROK

Of course.

(The tricorder warbles uncertainly.)

No, just stembolts in there.

NEEVA

Let's see. Five paces up, and now two across, and scanning... and I'm still looking at exactly what's accounted for in our cargo manifest.

LORHROK

I'm not clear what we're supposed to be seeing. Another crate? Something in a crate we're not expecting? Everything here looks like it should, and we don't exactly take on a lot of unknown packages in the Delta Quadrant.

PENA

I bring my message directly to you, the people, unfiltered through the press. It is the press, above all, which wages a positively fanatical and slanderous struggle, tearing down everything which can be regarded as a support of the Federation's autonomy, cultural elevation, and economic independence.

Context: This is a close paraphrase of Hitler.

LORHROK

Spast, she's a parody of herself. I suppose it always was the less clever or educated who voted for her party anyway.

NEEVA

That's among the most clueless things I've heard you say, Alecz, and you've given me some doozies. I grew up in a lawless society. What makes the Federation different, what elevates it above the brutality of so many societies, isn't some nebulous set of ideals or values. It's our Constitution, our laws, and the fact that we enforce them. So yes, I vote for a strict interpretation of that law. That usually means Pena's party.

LORHROK

But not this time.

NEEVA

Just the opposite! Not that I like the other choices. Pena refers to violating the first, fourth, and seventh Guarantees as if she were ordering raktajino. Somehow, the party of the law is endorsing casual lawlessness. It gives me chills.

LORHROK

Ow!

NEEVA

Alecz?

LORHROK

I stubbed my toe.

NEEVA

On...?

LORHROK

On... on a cloaked crate. Hang on, I can feel the opening latch.

We hear a hiss and the clack of the crate opening.

LORHROK

That looks like...

NEEVA

A Romulan cloaking device. I've never seen one in person before. (Both scan actively with their tricorders)

LORHROK

They had us retrofit one into a warp core in Chief Engineer training. In case we'd ever need to know. But that was an old model, and this... this is cutting edge. I do believe this is...

NEEVA

A *phasing* device.

LORHROK

I thought even the Romulans had abandoned those experiments.

NEEVA

Apparently not. I should have given your friend Rol more credit. (Lorhrok's PADD beeps insistently.)

LORHROK

Look! It's more instructions from Rol, somehow keyed to our opening this crate.

NEEVA

Let's take the instructions to the captain. And the device to J'naya.

LORHROK

I almost forgot to listen to our dear Ms. Pena. She's... she's talking about you, Neeva.

NEEVA

I knew she would.

PENA

I will obliterate the Orion buccaneers who have plagued our honest traders for too long. Piratical culture permeates the Orions. Honest women should not fear green fingers stealing their goods, nor superpowered pheromones stealing their husbands. Of course, I make no aspersions toward the appetites of Denobulan women. Among the peoples of our mighty Federation, I do not claim that anyone is superior or inferior. I merely say, we differ. Denobula is for the Denobulans. Vulcan is for the Vulcans. Bolarus for the Bolians. And Earth... well, as we say, Earth first.

Scene 05

INT. Excelsior Main Engineering

J'NAYA

All right, ladies and one gentlemen, we have a large and very precise job ahead. Here's the plan.

One: the Excelsior enters Borg space while phased and cloaked.

Two: we locate the target Unimatrix from an unmanned Borg comms relay.

Three: we insert Bluegill code at three different physical locations in the unimatrix.

(beat)

Part three is where it gets complicated. (blink) *More* complicated. The Excelsior will run with minimal thrusters to maintain its cloak, and the three pods we send to the Unimatrix will have no thrust or power at all beyond the push we give them out the hatches. The marines will wear EVA suits. Our calculations must be precise.

ADOW

I just want to know when I get to open that cloaking device.

J'NAYA

In about thirty seconds! Hendrix, Collum, you're on pod one. Bij, Veerak, pod two. Wen, N'kta, pod three. Adow, you're with me installing the cloaking device.

(beat) Well, what are you looking at, then? Let's get to work!

SFX: The crew members working on their pods exit, possibly a "Yes sir!" depending on how Excelsior handles casting for such small roles.

[While J'naya and Adow install the cloaking device, Adow discusses having recently listened to broadcasts from the Terra Prime movement. They decry over a quarter of Earth's population being non-human, including many half-humans. Adow echoes a stronger version of Pena's rhetoric that ostensibly does not devalue anyone but simply claims that each people should have their own world, and belong on their own world. J'naya protests that she is half Risian and asks whether she "belongs" on Earth.]

Scene ??

[An additional scene to consolidate certain character relationships or responses might be suitable here before entering the more action-driven portion of the episode. Possibly to elevate the tension of entering Borg space? Nothing on sensors, but everyone is holding their breath?]

Scene 06

INT. Excelsior Bridge

YUBARI

Captain, we're picking up a weak distress signal within short range.

LORHROK

This close to Borg space?

NEEVA

Someone must not know where they're going!

DOVAN

Do not break our radio silence, but take us closer. Maybe we can help whoever it is get out of here without breaking our cover.

HELM

Aye, Captain.

YUBARI

Their transmission was garbled, but I've patched it.

DOVAN

On speakers.

ALIEN CAPTAIN

This is Captain Jora-Na of the Valandrian exploration vessel Sigur-ur requesting assistance from any friendly ship within range. We are unable to repair our warp coils and are stranded. While our homeworld is distant, we gladly compensate any who would lend us aid.

DOVAN

Valandrian!

SHARP

They've reportedly made great strides into becoming a peaceful society since we eliminated the alien influence on their planet. They're focused on exploration now, not unlike Earth in the 22nd century.

DOVAN

You keep tabs on the places we've been?

SHARP

You're the captain, and you don't?

DOVAN

Point taken. Yubari, passive scans.

YUBARI

Their story checks out. It looks as if their warp coils weren't ready for the length of voyage they've endured and can't generate a warp field. Everything else looks like it's in working order. I'm sending the data to J'naya.

DOVAN

Are you seeing this in engineering, Commander?

J'NAYA (over comms)

Aye, captain. It'd be a simple fix for us, really. Like screwing in a light bulb. A few hours tops, or if they use similar design principles to ours, a few minutes even.

DOVAN

So the question is whether we can get them out of Borg space without risk of detection. We can't uncloak, and we can't hail them. J'naya, could we beam over the needed personnel and equipment without risk to our cloak?

J'NAYA (over comms)

Assuming our cloak hides us from Borg sensors to begin with, Captain. If it does, then yes, we can.

DOVAN

And if it doesn't, it won't matter anyway. Make the necessary preparations. You have five minutes to be ready and fifteen minutes to beam over, explain to the Valandrian's that you're friendly, and get the [job done]

YUBARI (interrupts)

Borg vessel incoming at high warp!

DOVAN

Jehoshaphat!

LORHROK

Red alert!

DOVAN

Belay that! No activation of shields, no activation of any tactical systems whatsoever. Shut down any unnecessary systems that aren't already off. Maintain the cloak.

NEEVA

Shutting down everything but minimal life support and passive sensors, Captain.

YUBARI

They're on an intercept course with the Valandrian vessel and broadcasting in the clear.

DOVAN

On speakers.

BORG (over speakers)

We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ship. We will adapt your biological and technological distinctiveness to service our own. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile.

ALIEN CAPTAIN (over speakers)

Approaching vessel, we are on a peaceful mission of exploration and are keeping our shields down as requested. We mean no harm and wish to avoid hostilities. If we have intruded on your space, we will depart as soon as we repair our warp coils.

BORG (over speakers)

Territory is irrelevant. You will be assimilated.

DOVAN

Tactical analysis!

YUBARI

The Borg sphere is their smallest recorded class of scout. We're in an upgraded Sovereign class dreadnaught, the jewel of the Federation fleet. This is the only ship battle that the Federation could pick with the Borg and win. (blink)
Valandrian defenses are negligible.

SHARP

We have to help them.

DOVAN

Negative. We maintain our cloak.

SHARP

Fine. Their shields are down, our shields are down. You can beam their people over before the Borg board them.

LORHROK

Are we in range for that plan?

NEEVA

Barely, yes, though we'd need to boost power to the transporters.

DOVAN

We're not discussing that plan. Keep all systems powered down. Lower power to life support to 50%.

NEEVA

At that level, we would lose sustainable heat and atmosphere within a few hours.

DOVAN

Hopefully the Borg sphere will be gone long before then.

SHARP

You mean hopefully they'll be efficient about mutilating and stealing the free will of those people?

DOVAN

That... is what I mean.

ALIEN CAPTAIN (over speakers)

To any friendly vessels in range, we have been boarded by a cybernetic life form. It has... interfaced with our engineering control panel. (blink) Comms, continue our broadcast. If these entities are irreconcilably hostile, Valandria needs to know. (blink) Borg male, we would parlay with your queen or other authority figure.

LORHROK

This is not going to end well.

ALIEN CAPTAIN (over speakers)

The cybernetic being appears to have uploaded all of our computer's libraries to the sphere designating itself as Borg. It has disengaged from our system and is now approaching me. (beat) Borg male! Cease your approach or we will respond with force. I repeat, cease your approach. (beat) Corporal, stop him.

SFX: A pulse energy weapon less advanced than a phaser can be heard over the speakers. We may or may not hear the fall of the first Borg and the sound of three more beaming over, depending on what feels logical to hear over a transmission.

ALIEN CAPTAIN

The cybernetic being has been incapacitated. He dematerialized almost instantly. Three more of his kind have transported onto our bridge. They move like automatons and are responding to none of the signals my communications officer is attempting. They are now advancing on my bridge crew. (blink)
Corporal!

The same pulse energy weapon fires in several successions of bursts.

ALIEN CAPTAIN

The cybernetic males have devised personal force fields that repel our phase pistols. They have seized my comms officer and tactical officer. Borg male: halt. We will give you any technology or supplies you desire in exchange for (we hear a mechanical whir of the Borg injecting the captain with nanoprobes, and Alien Captain lets loose a short scream that turns into a gurgle.)

YUBARI

They're not even bothering to lock the Valandrians in a tractor beam.

SHARP

Alcar, if we're going to save these people, we have to act *now*.

DOVAN

My orders stand.

ALIEN FIRST OFFICER

(over speakers, panting as he speaks--he is clearly running.)

Attention any friendly vessels: we require immediate rescue. A cybernetic life-form has boarded our vessel. They appear to have taken control of our comms and tactical officers. Now our captain too. Anyone, please, assist us. (blink) All hands! This is the first officer. We have been boarded. The boarders are immune to our phase pistols, and they take control of the bodies of anyone they physically seize. Fight them with any weapon, any tool. Security teams, rendezvous with me at secondary control. Resist.

LORHROK

(woefully)

Resistance is futile.

SHARP

Captain, as the ship's chief medical officer I invoke my authority over the emergency transporters during a medical crisis under Starfleet regulation M-137.

DOVAN

Wait, is that a real regulation?

NEEVA

It is, in fact. Of course, those regulations were written without cloaking devices in mind.

SHARP

(Walking toward one of the rear control consoles.)

Because standing by and letting innocent people die isn't what Starfleet does.

DOVAN

Melissa, stop walking toward that console. That is an order.

SHARP

Like the orders you gave over Gevinon Prime? You forgot how far legal orders go then, and you haven't remembered since. I have invoked my medical authority.

DOVAN

This is your last warning, Melissa.

SHARP

Or what, Alcar? Computer, prepare for emergency transport of all lifeforms with no Borg nanoprobes to [sickbay from these coordinates.]

DOVAN (interrupts)

Yubari, step between Melissa and that console.

YUBARI

(footsteps) Aye, Captain. (beat) Melissa, I'm sorry.

SHARP

You're not the person to blame, Asuka.

ALIEN FIRST OFFICER (over speakers)

They're breaking through the doors! Welders, rivet guns, anything you have, fire!

SFX: We hear weapons and tools of whatever variety the Valandrian security team has been able to muster discharge, with little evidence that any of them have substantive effect. As the

following exchange of dialogue progresses, the sounds of melee and struggle gradually shift to shrieks of terror or sounds of being choked.

SHARP

Alcar, there are still people in other parts of that ship we can save.

DOVAN

Lieutenant, please escort the doctor away from the console.

SHARP

Would you stop me if I reached past you to enter those coordinates, Asuka?

YUBARI

(pained)

Please don't.

DOVAN

I realize I'm the last person to threaten anyone with a court-martial, but [my orders in a combat situation must take priority.]

SHARP

(interrupts, furious, as we hear her and Yubari's footsteps)

That's right, you are. But not for the reason you think. Not because you're that rebel commander who disobeys orders. But because you're the captain who gives *illegal* orders. You ordered the death of every living being back on Gevinon Prime, and you lied to your Chief Medical Officer--*me*--in order to use a biological weapon to do it. Even if the Federation Senate had voted to declare war--*which they hadn't*--no situation, no circumstance makes those orders legal.

DOVAN

It was a garrison world, and the native Gevinese had been long since infested by the bluegills. They were dead already, Melissa.

SHARP

We could have saved their young! The person inside lives for months after infestation, and every single person who's experiencing that slow, terrible murder deserves rescue. Every one. Even in your imaginary universe where a fully populated planet doesn't have a single civilian, not a single person to shine the boots of the military or make their coffee, do you believe that slaughtering every last Zero was in any way justifiable?

DOVAN

Mel[issa, every Federation world would be Borged or bluegilled by now if we hadn't]

SHARP

(interrupts)

I don't care what you answer, Federation law doesn't agree with you, and any decent conscience agrees even less. But you're not hearing the point. In engagements with the Sword of Damocles, you have given illegal orders and deceived me in order to gain my compliance. Your current actions give me just cause to believe you will do so again. Therefore, I will follow no order of yours for the remainder of this mission, nor will I aid in this mission in any fashion. Should we have casualties, I will uphold my duties to the Hippocratic Oath and execute my responsibilities as the ship's doctor.

DOVAN

Is that all?

SHARP

That is all.

DOVAN

Lieutenant Yubari, please escort Melissa to sickbay. Computer, please revoke Melissa Sharp's entry privileges to the bridge and to other security-clearance-one areas of the Excelsior.

YUBARI

Melissa?

SHARP

You don't need to say it, Asuka.

(a few footsteps, and then)

You know what, *Captain*? Maybe you--*just* you--should start calling me Doctor.

(footsteps, and the turbolift door opens and closes behind them)

ALIEN SOLDIER

(over speakers, in panic, with sounds of pandemonium faintly behind him)

They've taken the captain. They've taken the first officer. They've taken all the command staff. It's only us left. Help us. Someone, please help us. Please. Please. Please!

HELM

Captain, should I stop receiving transmissions?

DOVAN

No. (blink) No, I think we deserve to hear this.

Scene 07 - Excelsior Turbolift

YUBARI

Sickbay.

(The turbolift beeps acquiescence and begins moving. Beat.)

Melissa. (blink) I'm sorry.

SHARP

You don't need to be, Asuka. I understand why you do what you do.

YUBARI

I understand why you make your choices too. And that you stick by them just as much as I do by mine. Maybe more, even. It's why I value our friendship so much.

SHARP

Same. Did you contemplate taking my side?

YUBARI

I think you know I can't answer that.

SHARP

We both know you don't need to.

YUBARI

The same way we both know you probably would have reached right past me if you thought you could take me. I saw the look in your face--sizing up the odds.

SHARP

Two cybernetic arms and years of both marine and Starfleet Intelligence training versus five-foot me. (blink) I think I would've creamed you.

YUBARI

Don't make me laugh right now, Melissa! I'm escorting you from the bridge. I'm not sure which of us feels worse.

SHARP

Probably you. I've wanted to say that to Alcar for a long time now. But there's something else that touches on our friendship more than this.

The turbolift reaches its destination. They get out and begin walking.

YUBARI

Oh?

SHARP

You and I have never voted the same way, Asuka, and it's never impacted our friendship. But this election is different.

YUBARI

I really can't stand Qvelb.

SHARP

Frankly, I don't like him either. But the opposition is someone who openly supports torture, seeks to discredit the free press, and directs fear and anger toward vulnerable minorities as scapegoats. Across all cultures, across history, that only goes one way.

YUBARI

That can't happen in the Federation.

SHARP

That belief is what lets it happen. I want to ask you something. You've probably heard the rumors about Terra Prime. Do you think that Adow was secretly racist this entire time?

YUBARI

I don't, actually.

SHARP

Neither do I. We want to think that good and bad things happen because of good and bad people. But it's not like that. Movements like this, they sweep people up. The people in them start accepting and then defending things they never would have before. And then they turn around when it's all over and ask who they've become. (blink) I don't want that to happen to you, Asuka.

We hear the hiss of Sickbay door opening as their footsteps pause.

YUBARI

I'll... I'll think about that, Melissa.

SHARP

Thank you. Breakfast tomorrow, as usual?

YUBARI

Always.

Scene 08

INT. Main Engineering

[The engineering staff scatters with final preparations for the mission as the Excelsior approaches the Borg beacon. Adow and the Major confer; their reasons for supporting Pena are not the same.]

Scene 09

INT. Borg Broadcast Beacon

(Borg vessel background noise. We hear the away team beam in.)

[The Major and Neeva delve to the core of the beacon in order to track the unimatrix responsible for hacking Federation systems, only to find two Zero already there with the same objective. Neeva provokes them into uncloaking their starship, which results in its destruction by the beacon, and the Major shoots them both. One host dies with the queen still alive inside, while the other survives and complains of losing a body he's only had for a month before passing out. Our crew take the bodies and the Zero infiltration software they were carrying.]

Scene 10

INT. Excelsior Sickbay

MAJOR

The captured bluegill (is ready for your attention, Melissa).

SHARP

(interrupts)

Zero.

MAJOR

Excuse me, ma'am?

SHARP

They call themselves the Zero. Stand back while I prepare.

SFX: We hear sounds of special preparations for a med bed underneath the following dialogue.

MAJOR

I wasn't aware we owed them any courtesy, ma'am.

SHARP

I'm sorry, have we started using slurs for any other civilizations on this ship? Oh yes, some people have. Well, not in my sickbay.

MAJOR

You of all people should have some feelings about these monsters.

SHARP

A Zero violated my body, stole my identity, used both to harm the people I love, and attempted to murder me. (blink) And I think we know where the galaxy would be if we began treating any species as responsible for the harm that one of their number has done to us.

MAJOR

With all due respect, ma'am, the one in this sickbay isn't any better.

SHARP

Any Zero we've had opportunity to communicate with is at minimum an attempted murderer. They murder people in order to gain what we take for granted: touch, sight, and embodiment.

MAJOR

That doesn't justify it, ma'am.

SHARP

Of course not. *And they know this too.* Some feel guilt or shame. They tie themselves into logical knots trying to justify it to themselves. They are capable of choosing not to kill.

MAJOR

They're built to possess and kill sentient beings, ma'am. It's how their biology evolved.

SHARP

Even if we grant that they're natural killers, they're capable of choosing not to kill--today, and the next day, and the day after. Any being with the gifts of self-awareness and moral reasoning is capable of making better choices.

MAJOR

And what better choices does a Zero have?

SHARP

Are they able to inhabit the psychic environments they can generate? Or maybe they could grow non-sentient anthropomorphic clones? I don't know.

MAJOR

I don't know either, and I'm fairly certain it's not our problem. Ma'am.

SHARP

It is exactly our problem if we want any outcome beyond either their annihilation or ours. The Zero who refuse to take hosts--how many might there be, and what happens to them?

MAJOR

They probably have even more problems with their careers than you do.

SHARP

They probably do. (She is scanning her patient.) Now if you'll stand back, I'll extract the Zero from the--mother of God!

MAJOR

Ma'am?

SHARP

The host. She's Vidiian. And her brain scans show that she's still alive.

MAJOR

Aren't they extinct, Ma'am? They were removed from the Starfleet list of active threats for this reason.

SHARP

Yes. Reportedly the Phage virus worsened and killed them entirely. But possession by Zero is known to heighten the physical abilities of the host. (A beat while the tricorder beeps worryingly.) She still has the Phage. I'm collecting scans of what Zero possession is doing with her immune system. I might be able to replicate it.

MAJOR

Could removing the parasite allow the Phage to proceed again?

SHARP

It will. And it's still the only way to save both lives. Melissa to Alecz. The host is alive and belongs to a species thought extinct. You may want to speak with her when she comes to.

LORHROK

(over comms)

I'm on my way.

SHARP

I've had time to refine the separation of a Zero from a humanoid. I'll have it done in a few seconds.

We hear some possibly distressing sound effects of the parasite being removed, then making some noises when out.

MAJOR

Now what do we do with it?

SHARP

What we would do with any criminal apprehended outside Federation jurisdiction.

MAJOR

And that is?

SHARP

For the moment, putting him in confinement.

MAJOR

A blue--a Zero would be too much of a risk in a brig cell, ma'am. Too much possibility of its hiding or creeping into something.

SHARP

Yes, that's why after our first encounter with them I prepared these jars.
Computer, extend force field around Zero holding jar 1. Beam the patient into holding jar 1. Now, restrict the force field to surround holding jar 1, authorization Sharp-beta-3.

(We hear each of these things happen.)

MAJOR

What happens if there's a power failure, ma'am?

SHARP

Then we find out if a Zero can break through transparent aluminum or unscrew a childproof cap from the inside. (blink) Personally, I think it has a better chance of breaking the aluminum.

MAJOR

Yes, ma'am.

Sickbay doors open and Lorchrok enters.

LORHROK

Is the patient ready to be woken?

SHARP

Yes. (We hear the hypospray)

[Lorchrok collects the Vidiian's story. A small number of Vidiians had accepted the Zero's offer of "cohabitation." With the Phage held back by infestation, a Zero can enjoy a Vidiian's strong immune system and never catches common diseases. This Vidiian's parasite did not take dream blockers because he enjoyed psychologically tormenting her while she slowly died. She was in her death echoes aboard the Borg beacon and therefore saw the parasite enter the access sequence for the Zero hacking devices, which she shares with Lorchrok. Sharp takes the Vidiian into an operating room to see if she can mimic the parasite's effect in treating the Phage.]

(Lorchrok's PADD trills.)

LORHROK

It's another message from Rol.

MAJOR

Sir?

LORHROK

Lorhrok to Captain Dovan.

DOVAN

Dovan here.

LORHROK

Further instructions from Rol. You should hear this too.

(blink)

“Alec, Melissa has just activated one of her bluegill containment fields. With any luck, this means you have a captive, and with more luck, even some bluegill hacking technology. You aren’t simply framing the Zero now. You’ll be helping them complete their mission and letting the Borg detect it. There’s part of this plan you won’t like.”

(blink, sarcasm)

Yes, Bev, because I’ve been loving all of it so far.

(blink)

“Someone with a Betelgeuse injection needs to swallow a captive Zero.”

(blink)

You’re right, Bev! I don’t like it.

(blink)

“Starfleet Intelligence believes that the Borg can detect the presence of a bluegill telepathic field. Not pinpoint its location, or determine numbers--but they can see if one is active. A connection between queen and parasite in the away team, and the use of real Zero code if you have it, will make this the perfect crime.” Spast!

(blink)

“Instructions for this eventuality have appeared only after your bluegill is captive because of the possibility of Melissa refusing to support this mission, and of your unwillingness to deceive or manipulate her into delivering a bluegill captive to you. Your conscience may be clear on that count. Melissa’s clearance for her forcefields follows.”

(blink)

Rol. Rol! Even when you’re dead, you’re manipul[at]ing your friends].

DOVAN

(interrupts)

Do it, Lorhrok.

LORHROK

Sir?

DOVAN

You heard me. Dovan out.

MAJOR

It's fairly clear that the infested crew members should be me, sir.

LORHROK

Major?

MAJOR

We have very few doses of the serum that inoculates against infestation, sir, and we know mine works.

LORHROK

Major, I don't feel this is something I can order you to do. To have one of those inside you again.

MAJOR

Permission to speak freely, sir.

LORHROK

Of course.

MAJOR

With all due respect, sir, do you have any comprehension what it means to be a marine?

LORHROK

Perhaps not.

MAJOR

I await your orders, sir.

LORHROK

Major, you will be going into combat infested. You will swallow that bluegill and use its telepathic field in our mission to divert Borg hostility toward the Zero.

MAJOR

Yes, sir.

LORHROK

Computer, establish a force field around the Major and Zero containment jar one. Now, release the force field around containment jar one, authorization Sharp 25122365.

We hear the Major unscrewing the bottle.

MAJOR
Bottoms up.

We hear the sounds of a Zero being ingested.

MAJOR
Well! I don't suspect he likes being a passenger. I'm myself, sir. Yesterday, you lost a game of parrises squares against me three to one.

LORHROK
Computer, lower the forcefield around the Major. Major, I don't think we're going to be especially welcome in sickbay for a while.

MAJOR
I suspect not sir.

They exit. A brief pause, then we hear the door to Melissa's side room open.

SHARP
AlecZ, I believe I'm making remarkable progress and will need to take some additional readings of the para--AlecZ?

She approaches the empty jar.

SHARP
Computer, who authorized release of the containment field?

COMPUTER
Authorization Melissa Sharp.

SHARP
(infuriated)
Alcar!

Scene 11

INT. Excelsior Bridge

[The Excelsior cruises very slowly through space thick both with Borg ships and Zero vessels, which appear to have been Kazon. Both sides have advantages in waging a war of position and do not fire on each other. This scene progresses with a quiet feeling of dread.]

Scene 12

INT. Excelsior Bridge and multiple locations in the Unimatrix

[A long and complex scene. The Excelsior launches shuttles running only on solid propellant onto three key sites of the unimatrix, where boarding parties must insert hacking equipment into nodes without being detected by the Borg, except for the Major's team, which must be detected but not caught. The Excelsior must then about-face to pick up the shuttles. Before getting back on the shuttle, the Major rejects the parasite and stomps it under his heel.

Lorhrok receives a final message from Rol as these missions conclude, which provides a monologue backdrop to the action-driven flight of the away teams to their shuttles.]

Soundtrack: 12th Doctor anthem from Heaven Sent?]

LOHRHOK

"This is my final message. The fluctuations in the Borg signal mean that you have followed my plan, and I have no doubts that you will succeed. But if my plans are being followed, it means we are also still losing. In her memoir, Captain Uhura wrote that a trick may win a battle, but it will never earn a friend. This plan was a trick, a trick to beat two enemies we see no way to befriend. And also no way to defeat. Even if the Mapstone leads us to an untold trove of Iconian wonders, what do we do? Do we rain hellfire down on a thousand, thousand Gevinons? There must be a better way. Somehow, a way exists to survive, and to uphold the ideals that make us worthy of survival. You convinced me again that this option exists. But I cannot see what it is. Alecz, I believe you are the person who will."

(beat)

Me?

(beat)

"Not Dovon: for all his good work, he resembles me and Brahm's more than any of us want to admit. And not Melissa, God bless her: she would die by her principles, and so would the rest of us. You. Especially you and Neeva together. Be the Federation, Alecz. Someone has to. I believe in the Federation, and I believe in you."

Scene 13

INT. Excelsior Bridge

[The Borg ships open fire on the Zero. A small skirmish for the two far outpaces any Federation battle in history. The Excelsior must escape while phased and moving with minimal speed and maneuverability. They must avoid passing through any vessel that might detect the resulting chroniton bursts, and they are still vulnerable to certain kinds of weapons fire, but the helm

officer must resist the urge ever to punch a quick maneuver or increase thrust. Dovan keeps the panicking helm officer on task while Yubari delivers the needed tactical information. Eventually they clear the battle area and go to warp.]

Final Scene

INT. Delta Lounge

[Lorhrok, Neeva, and J'naya congratulate each other on democracy preserved as they approach the Delta Lounge. As they approach, they hear chants of "Earth first!" and find that Pena has won the election. The Major and Adow are among those chanting.]

LORHROK

But we stopped the Borg. We removed the alien influence. How could this happen?

NEEVA

Every holodrama about the Federation being less than itself revolves around an evil admiral, an alien conspiracy, or somehow something other than its people doing exactly this. Has it never occurred to you that if they're afraid and angry enough, people might support this on their own?

J'NAYA

For the first time, I'm not sure if a Federation ship is the safest place for me to be.

NEEVA

You and a lot of people not human, J'naya.

Chants of "Earth first!" grow louder and crescendo. For the final cry, all other voices fall out, and we hear only Adow: "Earth first!"