

ROSSUM'S USEFUL HOLOGRAMS
A STARSHIP EXCELSIOR
VIGNETTE
By
CLAY DUGGER

Featuring:

Capt. Dovan
Lt. Yubari
Lt. Lorhrok
Lt. Commander Neeva
Dr. Sharp
Lt. Commander Kestra J'Naya
Ensign Adow
Excelsior's Ship's Computer
Holographic Captain

INT. BRIDGE

Lt. Lorhrok and Ensign Adow are on watch.

ENSIGN ADOW

Sir? Long range sensors are picking up a ship.

LORHROK

Details?

ENSIGN ADOW

None yet. Too far. It's really only a blip at this...oh.

LORHROK

Oh, what, Ensign.

ENSIGN ADOW

Silhouette looks like Starfleet design, but the computer can't match it.

LORHROK

Bring it on screen.

ENSIGN ADOW

Still too far to get a visual.

NOTE: Give the full line. Interruption will be put in during production.

LORHROK

(interrupting)

The silhouette, Ensign. Put that on the screen.

Beat

LORHROK

No.

DOVAN

'No', what, Mr. Lorchrok?

LORHROK

(surprised)

Captain! I wasn't expecting you for another hour.

DOVAN

Eh, it's too quiet. Figured I would come bother the bridge before breakfast. Now, 'No', what, Mr. Lorchrok?

LORHROK

Nothing, sir. Ensign, flag that as a sensor anomaly and I will look into the cause later.

ENSIGN ADOW

Sir?

LORHROK

(Very insistent)

Just get that off the screen. It is nothing!

DOVAN

Belay that order, Ensign. What is that, a ship?

LORHROK

No, sir, It isn't.

DOVAN

I wasn't asking you, Lieutenant. I asked her. Ensign?

ENSIGN ADOW

A ship at the fringe of the Long Range sensors, sir. Silhouette appears Starfleet, but it isn't in the computer.

DOVAN

Computer, identify the ship on Long Range sensors.

COMPUTER

Unable to identify. Configuration and silhouette do not appear in Starfleet databases.

DOVAN

Is it similar to Starfleet design norms?

COMPUTER

Yes.

LORHROK

It isn't a ship, sir. Just some flotsam. We shouldn't bother with it.

DOVAN

Alec, what is wrong? Do you know that ship?

LORHROK

What ship, sir?

DOVAN

(sighing)

Ready room. Now.

INT. READY ROOM

DOVAN

What is going on?

LORHROK

I don't know what you mean, sir.

DOVAN

Alecz, what is wrong? Why are you denying that ship is a ship?

LORHROK
What ship?

DOVAN
If this is a comedy routine, it isn't funny.

LORHROK
(sighing)
Do you trust me, sir?

DOVAN
With my life. Otherwise, you wouldn't be on this ship.

LORHROK
It isn't a ship, sir. It is a sensor anomaly that we should wipe from the system.

DOVAN
You aren't joking, are you?

LORHROK
No, sir.

DOVAN
Dovan to bridge.

ENSIGN ADOW
(over intercom)
Sirs, we are being hailed by the ship. It is a distress call.

DOVAN
Change course, Warp 2. Inform them we are on our way.

LORHROK
Sir, you must not...

DOVAN
I have never refused a call for help, Alecz, and I will never. Nobody *on my crew* will ever refuse a call for help. Am I clear?

Lorhok
Sir...

DOVAN
Are you on my crew?

LORHROK
Yes, sir.

DOVAN
I would hate to lose your valuable services, Mr.
Lorhrok. Do you understand?

LORHROK
Yes, sir. I will be in my quarters.

DOVAN
(shocked)
What?

LORHROK
I cannot assist you. Therefore I must resign.

SFX: Footsteps, door opening and closing.

DOVAN
(sotto voce)
Jehosaphat.

INT. BRIDGE

ENSIGN ADOW
Sir, we are approaching the vessel.

DOVAN
On screen.

SFX: Screen activates

DOVAN
Whoa.

ENSIGN ADOW
What kind of ship is that?

DOVAN

Yellow alert. Senior staff to the Bridge. Mr. Lorhrok, that includes you, and if you don't come voluntarily I will have Lt. Yubari drag by your toes.

ENSIGN ADOW

We are on station, two thousand kilometers off her bow.

DOVAN

Any further contact?

ENSIGN ADOW

No, sir. No response to hails.

DOVAN

Life signs?

ENSIGN ADOW

No, sir. No indication that there is any life support at all.

DOVAN

Is there damage?

ENSIGN ADOW

None on the outside, but the Warp core is in the second stage of critical failure.

NEEVA

What's going on, sir?

KESTRA

What is that?

YUBARI

Really? By his toes?

DOVAN

I need to ask a stupid question, but does everyone else see what I see? Four oversized Warp nacelles, a fuselage that can't be more than three decks, and a main deflector the size of an old Constellation class saucer section?

KESTRA
That's what I see, sir.

YUBARI
Me, too.

DOVAN
Alright, then. Park it here for now, Ensign. If it moves or speaks, call me. All of you, Ready Room.

INT. READY ROOM

DOVAN
Well, any ideas? Mr. Lorhrok seems to know quite a lot, and was willing to resign rather than tell me.

YUBARI
What? You quit?

LORHROK
I had no choice.

DOVAN
I haven't accepted his resignation. Yet. If he doesn't spill, though, I might just march him out the airlock. Now, what can't you tell us?

LORHROK
About what?

SHARP
Alec, what is going on?

YUBARI
Yeah, you can't just quit.

DOVAN
Stop. Alec, can I assume you are under orders?

LORHROK
About wha...

DOVAN
Can it! Are you operating under orders?

LORHROK
Yes, sir.

DOVAN
Whose?

LORHROK
(reluctantly)
Fleet Admiral Clayton.

DOVAN
He hasn't been in Command...

LORHROK
Since I was on the Steadfast, yes, sir.

DOVAN
So his office sent down...

LORHROK
No, sir. Fleet Admiral Clayton personally relayed his orders to us.

DOVAN
And those orders were that this ship does not exist?

LORHROK
What ship, sir?

YUBARI
Sir, may I punch him?

KESTRA
No, sir, let me.

DOVAN
Quiet. Lorhrok , *if* this were a real ship, *and* you were able to talk about it, what would you hypothetically tell us? And do *not* evade me this time.

LORHROK
Computer, disable all monitoring in this room. Only allow incoming communication.

COMPUTER

Monitoring is disabled for the Ready Room.

DOVAN

It's that serious?

LORHROK

I never said this. You never heard this. I am under penalty of death if I tell you what I am about to say. I understand this and accept it. Hearing it may place all of you under that same penalty. Knowing that, Captain, do you wish for me to continue?

SHARP

Well, now you *have* to tell us.

DOVAN

Mr. Lorhrok, they have issued a distress call. If you have information that will help us help them, tell me.

LORHROK

After my promotion to Lieutenant Junior Grade, I was made part of a small team designing a new class of ship. We were very good, and very fast. We came up with the initial designs within a few weeks. Just the ship, structure, drives, the physical ship. Nothing on the controls or computer.

NEEVA

So? A lot of people do that.

LORHROK

It was an unmanned ship.

SHARP

You mean a probe?

LORHROK

No, it was supposed to have a crew of nine.

SHARP

But you said unmanned?

LORHROK

Yes.

DOVAN
You aren't making any sense.

KESTRA
They didn't!

LORHROK
(surprised)
How do you know about it?

KESTRA
It was just a rumor among the Engineers. An unmanned ship that could break the Warp 10 barrier.

LORHROK
The Rossum was supposed to be the prototype for the flagship for a new direction Starfleet wanted to go. One that would not risk any lives. At all. This prototype was to be as pure an exploration vessel as could exist. Fast enough to travel to the farthest reaches. No weapons. No supplies. No personnel. No lives risked. With a crew of nine.

(beat)
Nine holograms.

ENSIGN ADOW
(over intercom)
Sir, they are hailing us.

INT. BRIDGE

DOVAN
On screen.

SFX: Screen activates

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN
Captain Dovan. I am pleased that the Excelsior is the ship that found us. We need your help.

DOVAN
How can we be of service, Captain...?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Just "Captain." That is how I am addressed. You will pardon my...mannerisms. We have not used speech in quite a while. The Rossum has been on an extreme long range research mission, and we have not had contact with Starfleet since our launch.

DOVAN

I understand that you are...

LORHROK

(clearing throat)

DOVAN

...in need of assistance. What is the emergency and how can we help out?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

We are undergoing a main computer cascade failure. I am able to communicate with you only by using my own...personal...communication setup. The ship's computer will fail very soon and the ship's Warp core will destabilize. Due to the...particular...mission, we have no core ejection capabilities, no shuttle, and no transporters. We...I...need you to receive a data packet containing our logs, research, and history. We are unable to send this data via subspace due to the computer failure, and it must be delivered.

DOVAN

Okay, let's put it all on the table. We know who you are.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

That is quite impossible, Captain Dovan. Our mission...

DOVAN

...is not one that biological beings were sent on.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

But, how? You shouldn't know this.

DOVAN

We have...sources. I don't care about the secrecy. I know that holographic beings have not yet been given status as individuals with lives and rights, but I also know that a Starship crew won't be left to die if I have anything to do with it. Can you survive in our holodeck?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Sadly, no. Our computer is our brain. The crew comprises too much information to be stored on any other system. We have already lost four. Their subsystems failed. Three of the remaining five are exhibiting severe loss of cognition. Only myself and our Chief Engineer still function. Either one of us would require more data storage and processing ability than all of your combined computer capabilities would be able to provide.

DOVAN

That is unacceptable, Captain. Mr. Lorchrok, Doctor Sharp, Ms. J'Naya, I need a solution. Captain, what is our time frame?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Lorchrok? Aleczhander Lorchrok is on your crew? Did he give you information about the Rossum? That is a violation of Fleet Admiral Clayton's direct orders.

DOVAN

Captain, I have no idea what you are talking about.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

I don't understand.

DOVAN

Let's just say that there is no record, transcript, or witness to Mr. Lorchrok relaying any information that he may have been directly ordered to keep secret. In fact, he was willing to resign his commission rather than even participate in this rescue mission.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Ah. Well, since we are having this conversation, it is all moot anyway.

DOVAN

I agree, except that we still haven't figured out what to do with your crew.

ENSIGN ADOW

Sir? The Rossum just launched a data buoy. It is in tractor beam range.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

That is the entirety of our research. By my figures, it is equivalent to single ship's research if that ship was on a 93 year mission.

DOVAN

Bring it aboard, Ensign. Captain, is there any way you can transfer yourself to a module that we can then beam aboard?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

I am sorry, Captain Dovan. The Rossum has no design feature which allows any of the crew to leave the ship. No portable processors, mobile emitters, nothing. This was an experimental ship, so nobody was to be able to acquire anything at all. Nobody on, nobody off. The data buoy is the sole way to transfer data in the event that communications were disabled. I am glad that we had that option. We have seen wonders you cannot

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN (CONTINUED)

imagine.

DOVAN

How have you avoided contact with other planets, other starships?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

We have the ability to hide.

DOVAN

You have a cloaking device?

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

No, sir. We...stole a trick from Captain Janeway.

DOVAN

A trick from...oh...you put holo-emitters on the hull. You can look like anything you want! Neat trick, if you have the power for it.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Holograms are kind of what we do.

SFX: Static sounds.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

(worsening signal)

I am afraid I am unable to continue, Captain. I have been experiencing a loss of cognition even as we have been...degrading ability....I, um, I am forgetting...things. I am sorry. Please, leave the area. The...um...thing is going to be...boom? Wait...

SFX: Control panel sounds

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

There. I routed all available processing to my subroutine. I am now the only existing member of the crew. Please, Captain Dovan, you must get far away. This core is extremely potent and the detonation will be powerful enough to take out a small planet.

DOVAN

We are not leaving you.

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

Captain, I cannot leave the ship. You cannot save the ship. There is no atmosphere, not even working space for a single physical Engineer. This ship is mostly dead already. Please, that buoy is everything we have done. Don't let our existence be in vain. If you die when this ship does, who will know what we have known? We found impossible things. Things that shouldn't be. Things that should be seen by real eyes.

SFX: Static sounds

HOLOGRAPHIC CAPTAIN

My time is almost up. I am sorry, who are you? I cannot...pretty.

Beat

ENSIGN ADOW

Sir? The Rossum' core is going critical.

DOVAN

(resigned, defeated) Get us to a minimum safe distance.

ENSIGN ADOW

How far is that, sir? We don't know..

LORHROK

Five A.U.s, ensign. Minimum. Even then, it's going to be bright.

DOVAN

Warp 3, Ensign, any direction. Keep the aft visual on screen. We may not be able to save them, but we can damn sure witness their sacrifice.

ENSIGN ADOW

Aye, sir. Warp 3, straight ahead. Aft visuals on screen. Core detonation wave is far enough behind us it won't be a problem.

Beat

ENSIGN ADOW

Minimum safe distance acquired, sir. Core detonation visible in five seconds. Three. Now, sir.

SFX: slight rumble

DOVAN

Mr. Lorhrok, are you alright?

LORHROK

(sniffing)

Yes, sir. It's just hard watching a friend die again.

DOVAN

Again?

LORHROK

The crew were, uh, modeled off the nine of us that were on the primary design team. The Captain there was an exact copy of my best friend at the time. He died in an accident in Engineering aboard the Steadfast. Burst coolant manifold. I was there then, too.

SHARP

Which crewman was copied from you?

LORHROK

I don't know. We weren't told. I didn't know J'athy was the Captain until I saw him on the screen.

(laughs a little)

He would have gotten a chuckle out of that.

DOVAN

Wait a minute. You said Starfleet wanted to go in the direction of unmanned ships?

LORHROK

That was my understanding, sir. The end goal was no living being on board any ship that might be placed in harm's way. Exploration, combat, things like that. There would still need to be people doing things, but the dangerous stuff? They wanted that to be holograms.

DOVAN

That's a scary thought. How boring.

YUBARI

Too bad we can't ask about it. It would be nice to know when we are going to be replaced.

SHARP

Why can't we ask about, oh, right. The whole death penalty thing.

DOVAN

What death penalty thing, Doctor? Whatever are you talking about?

LORHROK

I was wondering that, too, Doctor.

SHARP

I'm sorry. Did you say something, Asuka?

YUBARI

About what?

LORHROK

(laughing)

Well, I'll be in my quarters when you are ready, sir.

DOVAN

Why?

LORHROK

My resignation, sir.

DOVAN

Mr. Lorchrok, you still have...23 minutes left on your watch, and I haven't had breakfast yet. Would you please restore the settings in the Ready Room? Doctor? Would you like to join me for breakfast?