

Star Trek: Excelsior

"Necessity"

by
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INT. BRIDGE

Captain Cortez is making a log.

CORTEZ

Captain's log, Stardate 92340.5. The excelsior has been dispatched to planet Eribia VI to establish a formal dialogue with its people. The Eribian system lies adjacent to many of the Delta quadrant's more populated regions, and having free passage through the sector would be invaluable in setting up a Federation presence. The Eribians have been very receptive to the idea of working with the Federation, so I trust our relations with them will continue to improve.

DIORA

Captain, we have entered the Eribian system. Estimate arrival at the sixth planet in 22 minutes.

CORTEZ

Thank you, Mr. Diora. Open a channel to the Eribian Prime Minister.

DIORA

Yes, Captain. ... Captain?

CORTEZ

Yes?

DIORA

We are being hailed. By the Eribian Security Council.

CORTEZ

Ehm. All right. On screen.

The viewscreen switches from a starry view to the incoming transmission.

BOKK

I am Sergeant Bokk of the Eribian Security Council. Please identify yourself and state your business in this sector.

CORTEZ

This is Captain Rachel Cortez of the Federation Starship *Excelsior*. We are here to see Prime Minister Noktokla on a mission of peace.

BOKK

Captain, your escort vessels will converge on your location momentarily. Please cooperate/

The viewscreen shuts off.

DIORA

Transmission ended, Captain.

CORTEZ

Escort? What are they thinking?

DIORA

Two Eribain battleships on an intercept course, Captain. They are moving to match our trajectory and heading.

CORTEZ

No one said anything about an escort.

DIORA

Their weapons are armed.

CORTEZ

Then, I suggest we don't argue with their... assistance. Request beaming coordinates for the Prime Minister's office. Mr. Doval, you're with me.

DOVAN

In light of the signs of, ahem, hospitality, the Eribians have shown, I insist on bringing along a security detail. For the captain's safety.

CORTEZ

Sounds logical. Have everyone in Transporter Room 3 in 15 minutes.

EXT. ERIBIAN PARLAMENT COURTYARD

NARRATOR

Cortez, Dovan, and two security officers have just beamed down. Prime Minister Noktocla is waiting with his Chief of Staff.

NOKTOCLA

Captain Cortez. You are very punctual. Allow me to introduce my Chief of Staff, Jekan.

JEKAN

Greetings.

CORTEZ

Prime Minister, forgive me if our ship alarmed you, but we are here on a mission of peace. The armed escort was hardly necessary.

NOKTOCLA

Captain, I'm not convinced this will be a very productive meeting. Simply put, I don't yet have reason to believe that the Federation has anything to offer the people of this planet.

DOVAN

That's ridiculous! We're offering you a trade and technology with hundreds of worlds in the Alpha Quadrant.

NOKTOCLA

As tempting as you make it sound, do not forget that you aren't the only galactic power capable of making such a generous offer. The people of the Eribian system need strong allies, Captain, and so we have no choice but to trust our friendship to the strongest power there is.

CORTEZ

(aghast, but controlled)
Who is stronger than the Federation?

NOKTOCLA
Why... The Romulan Star Empire.

Dramatic music cue.

NOKTOCLA (cont'd)
In fact, there's our official
representative now.

Enter Commander Relan, followed by Subcommander Dutuik.

RELAN
Captain Cortez, it is my duty to
inform you that as of today, the
Eribian System is now a territory
of the Romulan Star Empire.

OPENING SEQUENCE.

Resume at the courtyard, with Cortez and Dovan facing off
against Relan and Dutuik. Prime Minister Noktocla stands
between them.

RELAN (cont'd)
Yes, Captain, the agreement was
signed into force only hours ago.
The Eribians were only too eager to
gain the friendship and protection
of the Empire.

Cortez' commbadge chirps.

LORHROK
(disbelief)
Captain, three *Romulan Warbirds*
decloaking in orbit. We're
surrounded.

CORTEZ
Acknowledged. Shields up and
standby.

Cortez closes the channel with a tap of her commbadge.

CORTEZ (cont'd)
Prime Minister, I thought we had an
agreement. If you were not
satisfied with our pact, why would
you not ask that we reconvene
negotiations?

NOKTOCLA
It would seem you and your
Federation haven't been entirely
forthcoming with certain...
(MORE)

NOKTOCLA(cont'd)

details. You never mentioned that your rivals were also finding their way into our system. That is a crucial security issue, and your lack of concern was most disheartening.

CORTEZ

I assure you, we had no intention of withholding any data from you. Until now, we were unaware of Romulan activity in this system... Or this quadrant for that matter. But, if you want to talk *deception*...

RELAN

Save your breath. As the Prime Minister had made very clear, the deed is done. Within six months, an orbital defense platform and a starbase will be orbiting this planet. Our Eribian Allies have been most generous in accepting our improvements.

CORTEZ

(to Noctocla)

A starbase? He promised you a starbase within six months?

NOKTOCLA

It will require significant sacrifices by our people, but the increased trade will more than justify it.

CORTEZ

Oh, so YOU'LL be doing the Romulans' heavy work? You might want to talk to the Remans and see how well that works out.

NOKTOCLA

Who?

CORTEZ

Prime Minister, please, our goal was a mutual cooperation between our worlds, and this man is offering you a weapons platform. The Federation's mission here is one of peace.

RELAN

Peace? She speaks to you of peace?
The Romulans have not instigated a
war in over a century! What is the
Federation's record, precisely?

CORTEZ

Are you...?

RELAN

Oh, that's right... The
Federation's failure to settle with
the Dominion led to the biggest and
bloodiest war in the history of the
Quadrant.

CORTEZ

(perplexed)

"Settle" with the DOMINION?! You
don't--

DUTUIK

That's enough, Captain. The Prime
Minister isn't interested in your
justifications. I suggest you
return to your ship, while you
still have a ship to return to.

CORTEZ

It would appear I am in no position
to argue. Good day, Prime
Minister.

Cortez taps her commbadge.

CORTEZ (cont'd)

Cortez to Excelsior- five to beam
up.

Cortez and Dovan, and the security detail are beamed back to
the ship.

NOKTOCLA

Commander Relan, what we are doing
is not the Eribian way. We did, in
fact, have an agreement with the
Federation. To withdraw without a
valid objection shows a lack of
character.

DUTUIK

I can appreciate the strong code your people live by, Prime Minister. Rest assured, the Romulan people also live by a strict code of ethics. Remember this... we are willing to share our cloaking device and singularity drives. Did the Federation promise any such thing?

NOKTOCLA

...no.

DUTUIK

And we have sworn to protect your world, as we would our very own home soil. Was Starfleet willing to say that?

NOKTOCLA

...no.

DUTUIK

(smug)

Then remember your place, and know that what you've done is for the good of your people.

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

Cortez, Dovan and their security detail have just materialized. Immediately, Cortez storms out the door.

CORTEZ

Call the senior staff to my ready room. Meeting in ten minutes.

DOVAN

Capt--.

CORTEZ

Ten. Minutes.

INT. READY ROOM

The Senior Staff is assembled around the conference table.

LORHROK

Captain, I understand the importance of establishing good relations with the neighboring systems, but from what you're telling us, what's done is done. Shouldn't we just chalk this up as a loss and move on to the next strange, new world?

YABARI

Allow me to interject. Normally, Lorhrok, that may be a reasonable option, but the Romulans have turned this into a situation we can't afford to ignore.

Yabari activates the viewscreen.

YABARI (cont'd)

This is a map of Romulan space... Romulus, Remus, and outlying systems and territories. It takes up an enormous chunk of the Beta Quadrant. The Romulans spent decades solidifying their foothold in their own sector of space... in secret. As you can see, the farthest territories skirt rather close to the Delta Quadrant. In fact, when Admiral Janeway was stranded in the Delta Quadrant, her original course home would have taken her through a significant part of Romulan space.

LORHROK

And how, exactly, did she plan on getting an Intrepid-class ship through the entire Romulan Empire in once piece?

YABARI

At the time, that problem was an estimated 67 years away. I believe her log said, and I quote, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

CORTEZ

The Romulans have been desperate for new territory since the loss of their homeworld.

YABARI

For over two hundred years, right up until Tomed, the Romulans built an Empire that stretched across two Quadrants. Now that Empire is weakened, and they're wanting to repair the damage by grabbing more territory.

LORHROK

But, how exactly did the Romulans get into the Delta Quadrant in the first place? When did that happen?

YABARI

We don't know... But... Starfleet Intelligence has noted some unexplained activity coming from the Iconian Gateway. It's been sending out readings indicating ships passing through, but sensors haven't registered any vessels actually entering the Gateway.

CORTEZ

If these were actually cloaked Romulan ships passing through, how many are we dealing with?

YABARI

Again, we don't know. But, it could be just the three we've seen here... or as many as twenty.

CORTEZ

Is there any way we can analyze those logs further? Possibly narrow down which ones could be attributed to Romulan trespassing?

YABARI

Not likely. There's too many variables, not to mention the fact that we're still not really sure how the gateway works in the first place.

LORHROK

But again... The Romulans have a treaty in hand. We don't. What leverage do we have in this situation?

CORTEZ

The Romulans want this system for the same reasons we do, trade and travel. That's all well and good. However, if they're opening a weapons platform here, they must be planning a very rapid expansion of their military in the Delta Quadrant. If that's the case, we don't want them to get a foothold here, with an Iconian Gateway on one side, and the threshold of Borg space on the other.

EXT. ERIBIAN PARLAMENT COURTYARD

NARRATOR

Back on the surface...

NOKTOCLA

So who are these 'Remans' the Federation captain mentioned?

RELAN

A labor class who have served the Romulan Empire for generations. We keep their planet secure and in gratitude, they provide us with the minerals needed by the Empire. It is the same arrangement we will soon have with your Eribian neighbors.

NOKTOCLA

Now wait, this is sounding like another way of saying 'slavery'.

RELAN

I completely understand. Prime Minister, let me show you the difference. Would you join me back on my ship?

NOKTOCLA

Yes.

RELAN

Certainly. My first officer will escort you to the beam-out coordinates.

DUTUIK
Please follow me.

Dutuik and Noktocla beam out.

INT. ROMULAN INTERROGATION ROOM
Dutuik and Noktocla beam in.

NARRATOR
Dutuik has taken Noktocla to an
interrogation room. Armed guards
escort the prime Minister to a seat
in the middle of the room.

NOKTOCLA
Where is the Commander?

DUTUIK
You misunderstand. This meeting is
not between the Commander Relan and
yourself. This is between you...
And the Tal Shiar.

NOKTOCLA
What the... Hey, let go of me!

Two Romulan Centurions grab Noktocla from either side, soon
after we hear the sound of him being punched in the gut.

INT. ROMULAN WARBIRD

NARRATOR
In Commander Relan's ready room, he
stares at a holographic map of
Eribia VI. A young Centurian
enters, carrying a PADD.

KIFAL
Sir, an encrypted transmission just
arrived from our convoy in the
Chaltok system. High priority.

RELAN
Thank you, Kifal.

KIFAL
Commander...

RELAN
Hm?

KIFAL

Forgive me for asking... But considering our resources are at critically low levels, why are we wasting so much strengthening these weaklings?

RELAN

You mean, the Eribians?

KIFAL

Yes, sir.

RELAN

You don't approve of our orders, Centurion?

KIFAL

It's not that, Sir. It's just... Why focus so much on this one planet? There are hundreds of others out there we could claim.

RELAN

From this planet, the Empire can become strong again, this time in the Delta Quadrant.

KIFAL

But if the Federation already had a claim here, why not pick another planet on which to revive the Empire? The Delta Quadrant is certainly big enough.

RELAN

Centurion... I'm sorry, but your age is showing. You did not serve during the Borg Incursions. For years, the Borg would wipe out entire Romulan colonies, while the Federation sat by idly and did nothing!

KIFAL

Did we request their aid?

RELAN

They would have turned us down if we had-- or worse, used the diversion as an opportunity to raid our space!

(MORE)

RELAN(cont'd)

No, Starfleet was more than happy to let us deal with the enemy at our gates... until, of course, a cube managed to make its way through Romulan space into the Alpha Quadrant. Suddenly, the Federation was very prepared to cooperate with us! Everything changes when *Earth* is in danger!

Relan composes himself.

RELAN (cont'd)

If we are to press forward and claim this space as our own, then we cannot afford to leave our borders unguarded. Every planet on the Borg perimeter needs a defense platform, starting here.

KIFAL

And now we must prepare this planet for our own uses, because we cannot trust the Federation for help.

RELAN

Indeed. It goes beyond that, Kifal. Some intelligence reports have even suggested that Starfleet has been capturing Borg drones and freeing them from the collective, in exchange for their intelligence. Some of the newer starship designs even look like they might use Borg technology. If this is true, the terrans are messing with secrets that could get us all killed. Starfleet isn't just unable to defeat the Borg, they have a vested interest in maintaining access to Borg technology. To answer your question, *that* is why we are here.

INT. ROMULAN COMMANDER'S READY ROOM

NARRATOR

After his "briefing" by the Tal Shiar, Noktocla is made comfortable and escorted to the Commander's ready room.

RELAN

Thank you for bringing our guest, Subcommander. You are dismissed. I can assure the Prime Minister that he won't be needing any more... *advising*... from you.

NOKTOCLA

You've got a lot to answer for, Relan. Your first officer assaulted me! What kind of trust do you Romulans want to rely on? And what is the Tal Sh-

RELAN

(interrupting)

We DON'T--- need to speak of that here. Suffice to say that our partnership with your world is something on which the Romulan Empire places its highest importance. So much so that my actual First Officer was temporarily reassigned so that I could be... *advised*... by one of their highest Intelligence branches. Dutuik knows as well as I do that at the edge of your quadrant are invading forces the likes of which you've never dreamed. If the Romulans and the Eribians don't work together to monitor what comes from those distant star systems, both our people will become victims.

NOKTOCLA

So you say, and on that point we agree... But you can't gain my people's help by manipulating their culture and asking us to take from our neighbors. You're asking our world to become... Yours.

RELAN

I've watched my world die, Noktocla. What we're doing to yours will be paradise by comparison.

NOKTOCLA

This was not our agreement!
Invading other worlds is not our
way!

RELAN

Don't be so naive. You know the
Borg. You know what they can do.
Without us, what is to stand
between Eribia VI and being
assimilated?

NOKTOCLA

Nothing. We'd be helpless.

RELAN

And if you're helpless, what about
Eribia VII?

NOKTOCLA

They... Would also perish?

RELAN

Is there ANY doubt, if you leave
them to their current defenses?

NOKTOCLA

No.

RELAN

So... By bringing them under our
protection, we're actually saving
them from their own weakness when
the invasion comes. And it IS
coming, my friend.

Noktocla cannot think straight anymore, he is bruised and
bleeding.

NOKTOCLA

I... see.

RELAN

Then you will order the deployment
of our occupation fleet.

NOKTOCLA

I... can't. I'm sorry, it goes
against everything we stand for.

RELAN

(angry)

Then...

(MORE)

RELAN(cont'd)

It would seem we need to redefine the parameters of our partnership.

NOKTOCLA

Perhaps if we...

RELAN

That will be all, Prime Minister. Centurion Kifal will show you to the transporter room.

INT. READY ROOM

NARRATOR

In the Captain's Ready Room, Cortez, Yabari, and Dovan continue to assess their options.

DOVAN

If the Romulans already have a pact with the Eribians, how long will they tolerate our being in orbit? For that matter, why do they tolerate us now?

CORTEZ

The Romulans weren't planning on having to deal with us so soon, so they need a show of force. I think by allowing us to interact with the Eribians, they're showing that we aren't a threat.

YABARI

Agreed. At this point, the Romulans would typically try to usurp as much of the local government as possible. If they are indeed planning on building a starbase, they're going to need raw materials and labor, and lots of them.

DOVAN

They'll be looking nearby. We're a little too far from home to be shipping in reinforcements from Romulan space.

CORTEZ

I think we touched on a nerve when I mentioned the Remans.

(MORE)

CORTEZ(cont'd)

Are there any planets nearby that could provide minerals?

YABARI

The neighboring world, Eribia VII has abundant deposits of titanium, duranium, and iron. It also has a sizable population.

CORTEZ

Perhaps we could partner with the people of Eribia VII, or at least warn them of the Romulans' possible intentions.

YABARI

Negative, Captain. The population Eribia VII is pre-industrial. It's too early to contact them.

DOVAN

Well, in times of pending invasion by another interstellar power, there are loopholes in the Prime Directive...

CORTEZ

Perhaps, Commander, but I'm not convinced we're out of options.

INT. ROMULAN INTERROGATION ROOM
Relan and Dutuik are meeting.

NARRATOR

Deep inside the Romulan Ship, Commander Relan and Subcommander Dutuik have another meeting, off the record...

DUTUIK

Noktocla is wavering, *Commander*. He cannot be allowed to jeopardize this project.

RELAN

I have the situation under control.

DUTUIK

I'm afraid that's not good enough. Remember, you may be in command of this ship, but as far as this mission is concerned, the Tal Shiar considers it too critical to entrust to one Commander. That's why I was assigned to be your "advisor". My presence here ensures the Tal Shiar that no mistakes will be made.

RELAN

Everything is going according to the plan laid out by central command.

DUTUIK

Then why is STARFLEET still here? Why do you allow Noktocla to continue to consort with them?!

RELAN

The Eribians are a proud people. They promised a pact to the Federation, and now need to withdraw. If we do not allow them to do so at their own discretion, it will undermine their confidence in us. The *Excelsior's* presence is a complication, but one that will resolve itself without our help.

DUTUIK

It is an unnecessary risk.

RELAN

So is allowing your new ally to see your weaknesses. Tell me, if you were in charge of a lonely planet in the middle of a giant star system, and you were going to ally yourself with an Empire from across the galaxy... who would you choose? Would it be the Romulans, who are rebuilding an empire and needing to relocate hundreds of thousands of refugees from our destroyed homeworld?

(MORE)

RELAN(cont'd)

Or, would you choose the friendly Federation, who will give you access to all their technologies, as long as you let them download your music and put up an embassy on some island no one ever visits?

DUTUIK

Exactly. We must take this planet now, before Starfleet takes it upon themselves to police this quadrant too.

RELAN

Dutuik, let's pretend I'm actually in charge of my own ship and do this my way. We're in the middle of another quadrant-- Our treaties with the Federation and the Klingons don't exist here. If the Prime Minister renews negotiations with the Federation, we can blast that ship out of orbit and seize the planet within 36 hours. Even if I'm wrong about this, the planet is as good as ours.

EXT. ERIBIAN PARLAMENT COURTYARD

NARRATOR

Captain Cortez has once again joined Noktocla in the courtyard. The two continue to try and find some acceptable compromise.

CORTEZ

So, the first concession in your pact with the Romulans grants Eribia VI unlimited access to cloaking technology?

NOKTOCLA

Yes. It was their first offer.

CORTEZ

I find that very significant. The Romulans' cloaking technology is one of their best-guarded secrets. We know that it puts an incredible strain on a ship's shields and deflector array, so it would make sense to only offer it to partners with a tactical need for it.

NOKTOCLA

Even still. That's just one clause. Most of the pact focuses on improving the quality of life on our planet, and reaching out to our neighbors on other worlds. We made it very clear that Eribia wasn't signing a pact that would pull us into a war.

CORTEZ

Perhaps so... But there's no way the Romulans would allow you to have cloaked ships if they didn't plan on you using them.

NOKTOCLA

Captain, I appreciate your insight. The Romulans are still very much strangers to us.

CORTEZ

Knowing what has happened back on our side of the galaxy will make their actions here appear more logical. Ever since the destruction of Romulus, the Romulans have been weaker than they've ever been in their history. And ever since they've made contact with the Federation, the Romulans have taken great measures to never appear weak.

NOKTOCLA

Understandable. Showing weakness would give opportunity to your enemies.

CORTEZ

Indeed. There was one case, which eventually became known as the 'Tomed Incident'...

INT. ERIBIAN CHIEF OF STAFF'S OFFICE
Dutuik is meeting Jekan.

NARRATOR

After hours, in Jekan's office, Dutuik beams in behind locked doors for an unscheduled meeting.

DUTUIK

Noktocla is wavering, Jekan. You told me that he was a man of resolve.

JEKAN

He is, but he is inexperienced with matters such as these. He is used to wasting time with the politicians, even in times of crisis.

DUTUIK

Our Senate was once the same way, and that caused us to lose our homeworld. The Tal Shiar is no longer willing to tolerate needless delays. If we cannot work *with* your people, we may need to work *against* them.

JEKAN

When the time comes, rest assured, you will have the support of the Eribian Defense Force.

EXT. PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, back in the Prime Minister's office...

NOKTOCLA

Perhaps I have given you the wrong impression, captain. I thought it best to clarify our position with the Romulans.

CORTEZ

Has there been a change?

NOKTOCLA

More of a reassertment of our interests and goals. The Romulans bring power, but we cannot allow them to use that to rob us of our identity.

CORTEZ

Power has a way of doing that, on many worlds.

NOKTOCLA

So, we have informed Commander Relan that the Romulan presence on Eribia will need to be built through our own hard work, and not with the labor of our planetary neighbors. If it takes ten years instead of a few months, so be it.

CORTEZ

I am glad you were able to avoid such conflict. It is... a tribute to your leadership.

Cortez' commbadge chirps.

DOVAN

Excelsior to Cortez.

CORTEZ

(taps badge)

Cortez here, go ahead.

DOVAN

Three Romulan warbirds have left orbit, on a course for Eribia VII.

CORTEZ

(alarmed)

Acknowledged.

DOVAN

And Captain... They're being accompanied by two Eribian battlecruisers.

NOKTOCLA

What? On whose order!?

The Prime Minister's computer terminal flashes a security memo.

COMPUTER

ALERT! Prime Minister Noktocla has been reported missing by his security staff. He was last seen with a visiting dignitary from the United Federation of Planets. Tall, brown hair, named "Rachel Cortez". She is armed and dangerous. Report any sighting to parliament security at once.

(MORE)

COMPUTER(cont'd)

By procedure, Chief of Staff Jekan
is assuming the role of Prime
Minister until Noktocla's recovery.

Jekan has entered the room silently.

JEKAN

Both of you, come with me.

NOKTOCLA

Jekan! What are you doing?

JEKAN

I'm trying to recover you from your
treacherous kidnapping by
Starfleet. Unfortunately, for my
plan to work, you'll have to be
killed during the attempted rescue.

CORTEZ

(tapping commbadge)

Two to beam up, NOW!

Sound of simultaneous phaser fire and transporter energizing.

INT. EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

NOKTOCLA

What the hell is going on here?

CORTEZ

That's usually my line.

NOKTOCLA

See if you can contact those
battlecruisers.

CORTEZ

Ensign, hail them.

RICKY

No response, Captain.

CORTEZ

Hail the Romulans.

RICKY

No response.

NOKTOCLA

Captain, you can't let them drag
our people into a war. Stop them!

CORTEZ

You realize by asking us to interfere, you're jeopardizing your relations with the Romulans.

NOKTOCLA

My first duty is to my own people.

CORTEZ

Ensign... Hail the Romulans a little more *urgently*. Aim for their shield generators.

A heavy burst of phaser fire rattles the shields of the Romulan Warbird. Commander Relan appears on the viewscreen.

RELAN

You'd do well to remember this is not your fight. Firing on us here is an act of war.

CORTEZ

You know as well as I do that the Romulan Empire is not prepared to wage another war against the Federation.

RELAN

Perhaps not... But I'm certain that out here, three warbirds could easily dispatch your ship, and by the time any Starfleet team showed up to investigate, all evidence of our involvement would be long gone.

NOKTOCLA

It was I who fired on you, Relan. The captain here is merely offering her assistance. I'm the one ordering you to stand down.

RELAN

I'm afraid it's too late, Prime Minister. You gave the order to attack.

NOKTOCLA

I gave no such order!

RELAN

Oh, but you did. Or at least, Jekan did, on your behalf.

(MORE)

RELAN(cont'd)

It would seem he understands the needs of your people better than you do.

Jekan appears behind Relan on the viewscreen.

NOKTOCLA

Jekan, what are you doing on that ship?

JEKAN

I'm sorry, Prime Minister, but there's simply too much at stake here to go through proper channels. The Romulans are offering to advance our planet by generations within a matter of months. I won't allow you to throw that away.

INT. ROMULAN WARBIRD

JEKAN

Commander, close the channel to the Excelsior.

RELAN

The Prime Minister is far less dead than he's supposed to be.

JEKAN

It doesn't matter. No one saw him leave.

RELAN

You'd better be right. The last thing we need is an uprising on *both* of your planets.

ROMULAN COMM OFFICER

Incoming message from Eribian battlecruiser.

The captain of one of the Eribian Battlecruisers appears on screen.

ERIBIAN CAPTAIN

Yes, sir?

JEKAN

I regret that we are still unable to locate the Prime Minister.

(MORE)

JEKAN(cont'd)

We have reason to believe the Federation ship was cooperating with Eribia VII in arranging his kidnapping. As soon as the Excelsior is in weapons range, destroy it. Close channel.

RELAN

You realize, by destroying that ship, you are assuming the position of Prime Minister?

JEKAN

(smug)

Do what must be done.

INT. EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

NOKTOCLA

I have a suggestion. Meet the invasion force head-on and drop your shields. Our custom is to never refuse a surrender. We'd force them to stop.

CORTEZ

Not a chance, Prime Minister. Your people might be inclined to settle this peacefully, but there's no way I'm going to drop this ship's defenses in front of three armed Romulan Warbirds.

NOKTOCLA

Our code dictates that to strike down a defenseless opponent, rather than negotiate, indicates a defeat, regardless of the outcome.

CORTEZ

Noktocla, with all due respect, right now those ships of yours are under the control of one of our worst enemies. I can't take that chance.

LORHROK

I might have a suggestion. Prime Minister, your agreement with the Romulans allowed you access to their cloaking technology. Have any of your battlecruisers been fitted with the device yet?

NOKTOCLA
I'm sorry, that's classified.

CORTEZ
If Lorhrok has a way to stop them
and keep this ship in once piece,
I'd call that a 'need to know'.

CORTEZ (cont'd)
(To Lorhrok)
What's your idea, Lieutenant?

INT. ROMULAN WARBIRD

KIFAL
The Federation ship is firing,
Commander! They're targeting our
engines.

RELAN
(To Jekan)
Well, Jekan, perhaps we can show
your people how the Romulans deal
with infiltrators. Eliminate them!

INT. EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

RICKY
Phaser damage, forward shields down
38%!

DOVAN
I'm pretty sure we have their
attention.

CORTEZ
Aim for the Romulans, maximum
strength. Fire two rounds. Then
go to warp 8 and head straight for
that asteroid belt.

RICKY
Captain! I--

CORTEZ
Do it!

INT. ROMULAN Warbird

KIFAL
They've passed us!

DUTUIK
Looks like we have them running
scared. I highly recommend we
finish them off, *Commander*.

RELAN
Agreed. Pursuit course.

INT. EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

RICKY
All five ships are cloaking.

CORTEZ
Doesn't matter. They're right
behind us, I promise you.

RICKY
We are entering the asteroid belt.

CORTEZ
Good work, ensign. Maintain
maximum reasonable speed. Lorchok
can you do it?

LORHROK
Two quantum torpedoes ready to go,
loaded into aft torpedo bays.

CORTEZ
Have each torpedo target the other,
impact 1,000 kilometers behind us.
FIRE!

A gigantic explosion rips through the minefield.

CORTEZ (cont'd)
Prepare two more torpedoes, fire
when ready.

Another explosion.

NOKTOCLA
Your weapons are breaking up
hundreds of asteroids in our wake.

CORTEZ

My people have a word for that,
Prime Minister. We call it
"shrapnel."

INT. ROMULAN WARBIRD

KIFAL

We're losing the integrity of the
cloaking device! There's too much
quantum interference!

RELAN

Never mind! Divert all power to
shields.

KIFAL

I... can't. Shields are failing.
We're deflecting too much debris.

RELAN

Then bring us to a stop.

Sound of engines powering down.

RELAN (cont'd)

Do we still have weapons?

KIFAL

Yes sir, but... I advise against
using them. Our deflectors are
totally overloaded... We can't
cloak or use shields.

RELAN

How quickly can we restore them?

KIFAL

Not fast enough. The Federation
ship is hailing us.

JEKAN

I suggest you listen to what they
have to say.

CORTEZ (V.O.)

This is Captain Cortez of the
Federation Starship *Excelsior*. I'm
here to inform you that this attack
is not sanctioned by the Eribian
government, and I'm ordering you to
stand down.

RELAN

The Eribians are members of the Romulan Empire, Starfleet has no jurisdiction here. On what authority do you attack our ships?

NOKTOCLA (V.O.)

On my authority, Relan. Consider our pact annulled.

EXT. ERIBIAN PARLAMENT COURTYARD

Cortez and Noktocla are walking together.

NOKTOCLA

I admire the the bravery of your ship and crew, Captain. Sending one ship against three Romulan Warbirds and two Eribian Battleships was quite a gamble.

CORTEZ

I had full confidence in my crew. Lorchok knew the cloaking device was a huge power drain on the ship, all he had to do was find a way to safely overload it.

NOKTOCLA

Trusting the Romulans was a mistake on our part, I can see that now. I do regret that we will not be able to join forces with the Federation. I can see you would have been sincere allies.

CORTEZ

It is not too late. Are you sure you won't reconsider?

NOKTOCLA

I'm afraid not, Captain. I nearly threw my people into a war because I chose an ally without knowing all the facts. That is a risk we cannot take again. The Eribian system will remain, until further notice, unaffiliated with any powers from your side of the galaxy.

CORTEZ
Understandable. This sort of thing
has happened before.

NOKTOCLA
Oh?

CORTEZ
Many of our quadrant's early
conflicts were caused by mining
disputes. The Federation,
Romulans, and Klingons fought many
battles over claim to mineral-rich
planets.

NOKTOCLA
It would seem that many of you
can't leave those old wars behind.

CORTEZ
It became a way of life for many of
us. It takes a lot of minerals to
create a fleet of starships.

NOKTOCLA
...And lots of mines to get those
minerals.

CORTEZ
Indeed.

NOKTOCLA
Although we cannot enter into a
treaty with your people, captain,
please know that your ship and crew
will always be welcome on this
planet as guests.

CORTEZ
Thank you, Prime Minister. Please
keep in touch.

Cortez taps her commbadge.

CORTEZ (cont'd)
Cortez to *Excelsior*. One to beam
up.

-END-