

Starship: Excelsior
"E.U.L.A."
(Season 5, Episode 4)
by James Heaney

Transcribed by Peter Stine

Note: Lines in brackets were recorded but interrupted. The complete line is left here for fuller context:

SCENE 4K-01**LOCATION: SHUTTLECRAFT (CAPTAIN'S YACHT MCKINLEY)**

(Lorhrok enters the cockpit.)

LORHROK: Magnetic alignment holding steady, sir.

DOVAN: Good, good. How about you?

LORHROK: Sir?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DOVAN: Oh, I picked up an aromatherapy kit from Counsellor Rustwick before we left. Circle time's in an hour.

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

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

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

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

LORHROK: Must be some human idiom.

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

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

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

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

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

LORHROK: Humans. (chuckling) Looks like we're off to a good start already.

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

LORHROK: Which one?

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

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

DOVAN: Ever... regret it? (pause) I'm just saying, it doesn't take a certified counselor to see that this has been a hard year for you.

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

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

(The comm panel beeps an alert.)

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

DOVAN: (sigh) Jinxed it. How far?

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

(He starts inputting commands.)

DOVAN: Put it up on screen while you do that.

LORHROK: Aye, sir.

(Screen pops on. A staticky signal begins.)

THE MAN: ...[Calling a]ny vessels in range. We have heavy casualties, but the sky seems to be [clear] for the moment. Again, this settle[ment is located on] south-eastern island in the northern archipelago. Repeat: the Island League begs for help, from [any vessels in range.]

(The static overwhelms the signal, and it cuts out.)

LORHROK: I have a location. Deeper into the field.

DOVAN: Alter heading and speed.

LORHROK: Those magnetic currents are strong. We'll be completely out of contact with the *Excelsior*.

DOVAN: We'll just have to make it quick, then.

(Lorhrok puts in some commands and engages the engines.)

LOCATION: SPACE

(The shuttle jumps to warp.)

LOCATION: SHUTTLECRAFT (CAPTAIN'S YACHT MCKINLEY)

LORHROK: Coming up on the origin now. (pause) I said they were close.

DOVAN: You weren't kidding. Take us out of warp.

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

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

DOVAN: The distress call is coming from the second?

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

DOVAN: Rolling out the welcome mat for the bad guys.

LORHROK: Sir?

DOVAN: Sorry. Another human idiom. Forget I said it.

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

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

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

DOVAN: Look. Smoke.

LORHROK: Is that a town?

DOVAN: Uh... Yes. A city. Not a big one, but see there? Right at the edge of the fire? I'd bet *darseks* to *hasperat* those are blocks of individual houses. Lifesigns?

LORHROK: Inconclusive.

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

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

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

(Sensor alert at Lorhrok's station.)

LORHROK: Hang on, I'm picking up high levels of boro-carbons near the surface.

DOVAN: Whatso-carbons?

LORHROK: It's a by-product of... Pull up!

DOVAN: What?

LORHROK: Get us out of here, sir! Computer, scan for pockets of tetrazine and display on [my navigation console.]

We hear a whoosh of flames outside the shuttle, then a large explosion! Alarms go off!)

DOVAN: What the--? Who's shooting at us?

LORHROK: Nobody! The sky just exploded! Number two engine is gone!

DOVAN: I know! We're going down! Get me a landing site!

LORHROK: Keep it steady... there! That looks like a park!

DOVAN: I can't make that! Brace for impact!

(The shuttle crashes!)

SCENE 4K-98

Theme song!

NARRATOR: *Starship Excelsior presents... E.U.L.A., by James Heaney*

SCENE 4K-02

(LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE)

NEEVA: Acting First Officer's Log, Stardate Six-two-three-three-eight-point-six. For decades, the planet Divitia has been safe from war and want thanks to its fantastic wealth. But no amount of money can stop an ion wave front.

YUBARI: You make it sound poetic.

NEEVA: Computer, pause. (computer pauses) Don't you have your own log to make, 'Captain'?

YUBARI: Did mine five minutes ago.

NEEVA: Right. Resume. (computer resumes) The natural disaster killed millions, but the *Excelsior* and a task force from planet Tulia stopped a meltdown in the orbital fusion plants. One of the Tulian crews sacrificed themselves, saving billions. We're moving off now to investigate the Ly'ven'tho Field, where Captain Dovan and Lieutenant Lohrok went missing almost a day ago. End log.

YUBARI: A bit dry, don't you think? If you're not going to worry about Alecz, at least say something mean about the Divitians.

NEEVA: Do you want me to kibbutz while I watch you record logs?

YUBARI: When you're acting captain, I'll be happy to show you how it's done. Sylveste, plot a course for the diffraction field.

(Alert on Sylveste's console.)

SYLVESTE: Actually, ma'am, I have an incoming message from Divitia. President Zahl on public address frequency.

YUBARI: If they try to sell us their gorram technology again...

NEEVA: (sigh) I think that's honestly how they say thank you.

YUBARI: Put him up.

PRESIDENT ZAHL: My friends, the people of Divitia are profoundly moved by your generosity in these past several days. You have provided invaluable support in the wake of this disaster, helping our agencies distribute food, rebuild roads, and protect our power.

SYLVESTE: If Divitian "agencies" were within five hundred miles of my food drops, it was only because they were in the ration line with everybody else.

NEEVA: They need their pride, Ensign.

PRESIDENT ZAHL: ...We are therefore moved to match your generosity with our own famous generosity. To every race that sent aid, we offer a one-month waiver of all licensing fees for any Divitian product lines to which you are currently subscribed and a special 18-month zero-obligation free trial of any products you are not using, plus one additional month for each starship you sent to the relief effort. Though this is only a token of our eternal grat[itude to all the sapients who helped us in this day of need... okay, I don't want to write any more of this sentence so you can stop here. But do record all this up to "okay." Thanks.]

NEEVA: Turn it off.

YUBARI: Make a note in our logs that the Divitians are a stunted, acquisitive culture that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

NEEVA: Again?

YUBARI: I don't want the Admiral twisting my words.

(Another console alert.)

SYLVESTE: Incoming message from Tulian flagship *Thir Thoren*, ma'am.

YUBARI

Guess they got sick of Zahl, too. Put the birds on screen, Ensign.

SYLVESTE: Aye, ma'am.

(The viewscreen activates.)

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

NEEVA: (whispering) *Thal Kray*.

YUBARI: *Thal Kray* gave their lives in the service of others. Our culture does not believe there is any greater act.

JERRIN: Nor ours, Commander. Yet their loss will be felt deeply by our flotilla and their families for many years to come. They kept our people flying. For one month. All they were worth to the Divitians was one month's fee!

NEEVA: I'm sorry, what do you mean by that? I thought "keeping the people flying" was a figure of speech. Do you subscribe to a Divitian product?

JERRIN: Not just a product, *Excelsior*. The product. Like most of the races who sent aid ships — most of the races in the Perenalthorias Union — we Tulians license our faster-than-light engines from the Divitian Technology Consortium.

NEEVA: They own your engines?

JERRIN: Not the materials, but the configuration is their intellectual property. The cost is steep — ten percent of our gross planetary product — but it has allowed our people to build and maintain colonies, to protect ourselves and spread throughout the stars. Your Federation does not offer starships-as-a-service?

NEEVA: We don't. In fact, it would violate our antitrust laws... if anyone had ever thought of it.

JERRIN: Then you are either stupid, or fortunate. We wish to discuss the "favor" you promised. The "favor" for which the crew of the *Thal Kray* died.

(Pause.)

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

JERRIN: During this past week, we have observed the *Excelsior's* precision sensors in action. You've saved many lives on Divitia simply by being able to find them. Our observatories, though better able to penetrate the Ly'ven'tho diffraction field than any of our neighbors', have no such capabilities. We invite you to augment them. We are willing to make some reasonable exchange as well.

YUBARI: A sensor upgrade?

JERRIN: In payment of that which we are owed.

YUBARI: Of course, of course. Neeva?

NEEVA: Mute channel. (The channel mutes) Well, they're an A-minus on the Scale of Culture, so we can't just roll out the Type-Fifteens, but I'm sure I can get approval for some form of technological exchange. Plus, they say they can scan through the diffraction field. With their observatories and our sensors, we might have a much better shot at finding the captain and Lieutenant Lorhrok.

YUBARI: They might just be running late. Still... Call Starfleet Command as soon as we're done here?

NEEVA: Will do.

YUBARI: Unmute. (The channel unmutes) We have to get final clearance from our government, but we accept your very generous offer, Shipmaster. We ask only that we be permitted to use your observatories to search for a shuttlecraft of ours that has gone missing in the diffraction field.

JERRIN: Missing? The deep Ly'ven'tho is a dangerous place to go missing. They could have been shot down by the Rayger Toog. Or become entangled in the, ah, environmental strife on Judaat.

YUBARI: Or just got behind schedule on their survey.

JERRIN: We shall be glad to help, however we can, once our sensors have received the upgrade.

YUBARI: The United Federation thanks the kind Tulian people for this indulgence.

JERRIN: As soon as we've honored our dead, our convoy will depart -- in half a local day. Many species left their homeworlds defenseless to help Divitia -- ours included.

YUBARI: We mourn with you, *Thir Thoren*. (pause) *Excelsior* out.

(The comm line closes. Yubari flops back down in her command seat)

YUBARI: (dramatic exhale) How'd that go? I sound okay?

NEEVA: Yeah, respectful, considerate, the works.

YUBARI: Lovely. Two hundred hours practicing b.s. in the mirror actually paid off. How do you do it?

SYLVESTE: Should I lay in a course for the Tulian homeworld?

YUBARI: It sounds like our best chance of finding the captain and Lieutenant Lorhrok.

NEEVA: Plus... we do owe them one.

SCENE 4K-03**LOCATION: CITY STREET**

(There's a big explosion, not far away. Windows shatter, part of a building collapses, car alarms go off, a utility pole collapses which snaps its electric line in two with a shower of sparks... Far off in the distance: the roar of a fire.)

(Dovan is half-carrying, half-helping a native man who's wounded.)

NESHENT: I'm only slowing you and Alecz down, Dovan! You don't owe me anything!

DOVAN: Uh, yeah, I do. I'm pretty sure you would have been evacuated from the island safe and sound by now if I hadn't crashed a shuttle into your house. Besides, we're still upwind of the main fire! Alecz?

(Lorhrok is approaching them.)

LORHROK: Actually, sir, I was just scouting ahead a little. The good news is, I found a candy-and-soda kiosk. Phasered it open and... here you go. (he opens a soda can) The bad news is, the wind just changed.

DOVAN: In what direction?

LORHROK: It's hard to get a precise reading because of the diffraction fields, but... we're in trouble.

DOVAN: Could have led with that?

LORHROK: We haven't had fluids in more than a day. Don't want to reach the subway just to drop dead of dehydration.

NESHENT: Can we still make the subway?

LORHROK: Well... no. The fire'll cut us off first. If we ran dead out from here to Laprop Canal, it'd be close, but...

NESHENT: But I'm not running anywhere on this leg.

DOVAN: We already saw the bodies at the marina, we have no idea how to get to the caves beneath the city, and the skyfire isn't showing any signs of burning out. That subway is currently our only way off this island.

NESHENT: Um... Synod Firth. There's a station at Synod and 9th. A little farther, but at least it's away from the fire.

(They start moving.)

DOVAN: Alecz, can we make that?

LORHROK: I don't see that we have a choice.

NESHENT: We can cut through this yard and over the viaduct, it's through this gate... Oh, no.

LORHROK: Look away, Neshent. Just keep moving. Whoever she was, at least she died quickly.

(Lorhrok pushes a metal gate, which swings open easily.)

NESHENT: Uh... (deep, ragged breath) Then... then just up the last couple meters of this hill... and down the other... no, no, no.

DOVAN: How'd the fire get over here?

(They crest the hill and the distant fire suddenly sounds a good deal closer.)

LORHROK: That gas explosion.

DOVAN: It must have ignited something.

NESHENT: Yeah, the air. That's why we call it a skyfire, Dovan! The tetrazine in the atmosphere can keep it burning for days!

DOVAN: Well, whatever the cause, it's cut us off. We have fire coming up from the south driving us toward a new fire in the north. Ideas?

NESHENT: We could stand here and shout at the sky, cursing the Capitol for causing this disaster.

DOVAN: Not bad, except we all die and it's terrible. Lorhrok, I'm inclined to just run for it, but I'm pretty sure you're smarter than me.

LORHROK: Than I. We could, um, um... We could link our tricorder and our combadges to generate a small forcefield. Wouldn't last long, not with all three of us, but throw in the phaser power packs and it might give us enough time to punch through the fire at a narrow spot.

DOVAN: That sounds great! Why don't we do that all the time?

LORHROK: It'll drain the power cells dry on all our equipment. We'll be completely out of contact.

DOVAN: The diffraction fields have already taken us out of contact. Save one phaser, but go ahead. And do it fast. The fire in the south is moving faster than I would have believed.

LORHROK: Start heading down toward Ninth. I'll catch up.

DOVAN: Before the fire does, I hope.

LORHROK: Hey, if I get rid of you, that's more forcefield power for me.

(Lorhrok starts working with the combadges and tricorder as Dovan hurries down the hill, still dragging Neshent behind him.)

NESHENT: When facing mortal peril, are you Starfleets always so... quippy?

DOVAN: Yes. (pause) Well, actually, no. I must be rubbing off on Mister Lorhrok.

NESHENT: Well, could you stop? Because I'm scared, captain.

DOVAN: You said this is all the Capitol's fault. I thought the Capitol was helping. They ran the evacuation, didn't they?

NESHENT: Oh, yes, they suddenly cared a great deal after the fire started. But before...

DOVAN: But how could they have known the tetrazine in your atmosphere was going to blow up?

NESHENT: Because they put it there!

DOVAN: Huh?

NESHENT: It's their engines. All that whiz-bang tech they rent from the Union. We in the League of Islands didn't go in for it. We take pride in our people, Dovan; we won't license ourselves away. Besides, we couldn't afford it.

DOVAN: Sorry, still not following.

NESHENT: Those Divitian engines weren't built to fly in our atmosphere! Their tetryon emissions react with the verterons, tetrazine builds up, and, one day, KABOOM! Another of *our* cities is on fire because of the Capitol.

DOVAN: That's what my first officer told me. But what I don't understand is... why do they keep doing it?

NESHENT: They say there's no problem! That our scientific findings are mistaken! Ten years of smaller fires, and now Elpam is the third island burnt to a crisp in eighteen months--and they say it's because we had a dry summer!

DOVAN: If flying over your cities is what's doing the damage, why not threaten to shoot down their ships?

NESHENT: Would you pick a fight with a civilization that could wipe out yours in a matter of minutes?

DOVAN: Well... yeah, actually. I would.

NESHENT: (sigh) Yes, me too. But the lazy cowards who run the Island League...

DOVAN: We'd better hold up here. We get any closer to this fire and I think we're legally considered a roast.

NESHENT: Captain...

DOVAN: Sorry. No more quips. Look, Neshent, we're going to be okay. The *Excelsior* knows we're missing by now. They're looking for us.

NESHENT: There are a hundred planets in the Ly'ven'tho diffraction field, and scanners are lucky to see a hundred meters. How could your ship, any ship, ever hope to find us?

DOVAN: Technobabble.

NESHENT: Captain...

DOVAN: No, Neshent, that's not a quip! I am being completely sincere right now: I have absolute, unshakeable faith in my crew's ability to save me by stringing together long science words that sound made-up. And if those words aren't enough, they'll invent new ones. Speaking of which, Lieutenant Lorhrok! You coming?

SCENE 4K-04**LOCATION: OUTSIDE THE AVIARY**

(Neeva, Doctor Sharp, Commander J'naya and an engineering team, and two security officers beam down.)

JERRIN: Welcome, my friends. Welcome to the Aviary.

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

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

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

JERRIN: We've already picked out several planets where your shuttle may have been forced down. We think the Judaat Capitol is likeliest, so we'll start there. And may I introduce Strategos Synoll, the chairman of our Science and Engineering Ministry?

SHARP: Strategos? Isn't that more of a military title?

SYNOLL: When most of your advanced technology is licensed from a much more powerful planet, my job involves as much foreign policy as it does science.

JERRIN: Of course, we are forbidden by our contracts with the Divitians from studying the technologies they've licensed to us.

SYNOLL: Of course. So some of my job is simply finding productive things for our scientists to do in light of those contracts, which we would never flout.

NEEVA: What if you did? The Divitians wouldn't go to war with you over a usage agreement.

JERRIN: No need for that, my friend. They'd simply deactivate our license keys.

J'NAYA: Oh, would they, now?

(She pulls out a tricorder and starts scanning and also typing in some commands.)

SYNOLL: But we don't mean to bore you with politics. Won't you come inside? The door is just at the end of the platform.

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

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

J'NAYA: Janey Mac!

SYNOLL: Commander? Is something wrong?

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

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

SHARP: By comparison to what? A starfighter?

JERRIN: The Big Brothers.

NEEVA: (whistles admiringly)

(Synoll reaches a door and flashes an ID card at it. It beeps and unlocks, so he can open it. But when he tries the handle, it's still locked.)

SYNOLL: A thousand curses.

(He tries again, same result.)

JERRIN: May I?

(Jerrin tries it.)

SYNOLL: Please. I'm certain we've paid this month's fee. All the other doors work.

NEEVA: What's wrong?

(The door doesn't open for Jerrin either.)

JERRIN: It appears this particular security door is having an activation problem.

SYNOLL: Usually it's an issue with the diffraction field. The Divitian server sees we paid and sends a license renewal order but it gets lost before it reaches our hardware.

J'NAYA: May I try?

JERRIN: How? You're not authorized.

J'NAYA: Well, when you mentioned remote deactivation, I took a look, and it turns out your license keys are all just public-key algorithms using integer factorization.

JERRIN: Sixteen thousand bits. Impregnable to anything but a quantum computer, which are still purely theoretical.

J'NAYA: Well, except my tricorder is a quantum computer.

SYNOLL: What?

J'NAYA: All transtators have a Q.C. So I just ran Shor's Algorithm, and I control your door now. Would you like me to open it?

JERRIN: (simultaneous) No!

SYNOLL: (simultaneous) Please don't!

J'NAYA: What? But... I thought you were paid up. It's just a communications issue.

SYNOLL: If they found out we could pirate a license key, whatever the reason...

JERRIN: They'd place us under interdict. Our starships, wherever they are, would be marooned. Our colonies, isolated without hope of supply.

SHARP: Your doors, stuck throughout the planet.

SYNOLL: Precisely!

NEEVA: We apologize, Strategos. We meant no harm.

J'NAYA: We just aren't used to the systems of late capitalism!

SYNOLL: Late? What's late about it?

NEEVA: I'd love to discuss T'Plana-Hath's treatise on labor after scarcity... at a later date. Is there a way around?

JERRIN: A few hundred meters this way, yes.

SHARP: And what about my patients?

JERRIN: Hm?

SHARP: You asked me down here to take a look at some patients. I'm a doctor, not a tourist.

SYNOLL: Yes. The victims of the freighter accident, Shipmaster.

JERRIN: Ah, yes! The freighter! This way, Doctor, this way.

(They walk away.)

SCENE 4K-05**LOCATION: CITY STREET - NEAR THE FIRE**

(Lorhrok is hurrying up. He's carrying a contraption that hums and whirs.)

LORHROK: Alright, I think it's working. Get as close as you can to me.

DOVAN: How long will this portable forcefield hold?

LORHROK: I don't know. We'll try and cut through the firestorm at the thinnest point; we just need to get a little east, then we'll be safe until the wind shifts again.

DOVAN: How far's that?

LORHROK: In the fire? One city block, maybe less. Hard to be certain.

DOVAN: Okay.

NESHENT: And if this doesn't work?

DOVAN: Then I have a terrible backup plan. Activate the field!

(Lorhrok presses a button and a forcefield snaps into place, though it continues fuzzing along.)

NESHENT: Is it working?

LORHROK: Quick! Follow me!

(They enter the fire itself.)

LOCATION: FIRESTORM

DOVAN: Lorhrok, I don't like the sounds the forcefield is making!

NESHENT: Some of the flames are getting through!

LORHROK: I'll try and keep us away from the hottest parts, but we have to make it to the other side now!

NESHENT: Is it going to collapse?

DOVAN: No!

(An alarm goes off on the generator.)

LORHROK: Actually, yes! The wind just shifted again – we're not going to make it out in time!

DOVAN: Alright, stop!

(They stop)

DOVAN: Time for Plan B! See that cellar door?

NESHENT: Yes! It's locked!

(Dovan shoots it with his phaser, at medium range. The lock blows off.)

DOVAN: Not anymore! Now get in!

NESHENT: We'll be cooked alive down there!

DOVAN: GO!

(They all run in the new direction and quickly arrive at this cellar door.)

NESHENT: It's too hot to open!

DOVAN: Alecz, grab the left side! I'm on the right!

LORHROK: I guess I don't really need that hand!

DOVAN: One, two, three, FOUR!

(They each grab a handle on the cellar door and pull it wide open. We hear the skin on their hands sizzling from touching the superhot metal.)

DOVAN: Agggggghghhg!

LORHROK: OwOwOwOwOwOwOwOwOwOwOwOwOw!

(They run down a few wooden steps.)

LOCATION: CELLAR

LORHROK: Close it, quick! The forcefield's collapsing!

DOVAN: Hang on! Where's my phaser?

(Dovan unholsters his phaser and adjusts the power level to overload. It starts to whine, and, grunting, he hurls it out the cellar door into the firestorm. The door slams shut and the forcefield finally fails.)

NESHENT: What was that?

LORHROK: The forcefield just collapsed.

(They all gasp in pain)

(Pause.)

LORHROK: And that was the full temperature of this basement hitting us. It's gotta be three-fifty kelvin down here, Captain. Even Bolian chemistry can't survive that for long.

DOVAN: Yeah, hence the backup plan.

NESHENT: You threw something out into the fire, right before the doors closed.

DOVAN: There's a dense network of geoclastic caves under the city, right? That's how the Archipelago was settled in the first place, you said.

NESHENT: Yes, but the only entrance I know is at the marina.

LORHROK: So why did you throw your phaser into the fire?

DOVAN: It's not a good plan. It's just all I had left. I'm not quipping, Neshent, I'm truly sorry. I set the phaser to level-sixteen overload.

LORHROK: Oh, no.

NESHENT: It's already a firestorm out there! How will one more grenade help anyone?

LORHROK: A phaser set to level sixteen isn't just a gun. One shot from it can knock down a small building, cause a cave-in. The technical manual rates it for six fifty cubic meters' explosive displacement. On overload...

DOVAN: On overload, the phaser's a bomb that'll collapse half a city block. Including this one. We'd better duck and cover.

NESHENT: Just because I don't want to burn to death doesn't mean I want suicide! Why would you blow us up?!

LORHROK: He's not. He's hoping the hill collapsing will drop us right into the caves.

DOVAN: Of course, if I didn't throw the phaser far enough, it will blow us up. But if we're lucky...

LORHROK: Really, really luc—

(There is an explosion. The building shakes... and collapses into the ground!)

(They all scream as they fall.)

SCENE 4K-06**LOCATION: THE AVIARY – ASTROMETRIC LAB**

(Synoll and J'naya are working side-by-side.)

J'NAYA: Well, that's kind of a strange question. I've got the magneton waveguides back up.

SYNOLL: Oh, I hope I didn't offend.

J'NAYA: No, no, of course not, I just didn't spend a lot of time with a telescope growing up.

SYNOLL: You didn't even stare up into space and marvel at it all?

J'NAYA: I was a computer geek! (pause) Well, okay. There was one.

SYNOLL: Hold that thought: I'm reconnecting power cell G-4.

J'NAYA: Oh, I'm all tangled up in that conduit. One sec.

(Grunting, she wrenches some of her tools free from a power conduit access panel)

J'NAYA: Okay, go.

(Synoll restores power to one of the cells.)

SYNOLL: So, what was it? Planet? Galaxy?

J'NAYA: A nebula. You couldn't see it from Earth, but from my Aunt's estate on Risa... no light for thirty klicks in any direction, and the sky just lit up. And there was this one ring of faint purple gas surrounding what looked for all the world like a sea of emeralds.

SYNOLL: What was it called?

J'NAYA: Oh, it had some horrid name. M.L.-forty-two-something-something. But it punched right through the far side of the Milky Way like a big eye looking down on me.

SYNOLL: Hold on. Purple?

J'NAYA: Yeah. So faint you almost couldn't see it.

SYNOLL: You mean... (he presses some buttons) ...like this?

J'NAYA: (gasp) That's it! But, how did you find it? And how did you get such a beautiful image?

SYNOLL: I used to look at this one too, growing up. But we're a lot closer on this end of the galaxy. I wonder whether we ever looked up at it at the same time.

J'NAYA: What do you call it?

SYNOLL: The Lady's Pillow.

J'NAYA: That's beautiful. It's beautiful. You're a... [very interesting man, Strategos.]

NEEVA: Kestra! How are you and Synoll doing with the sensors?

SYNOLL: I'll go check the forward relays up top, Commander.

J'NAYA: Sounds good, Strategos.

(Synoll climbs up a ladder.)

NEEVA: So? How's it going?

J'NAYA: Well, I'm eighty percent sure he's going to ask me to go out stargazing with him tonight, and sixty percent sure it's just an excuse for him to kiss me.

NEEVA: And how do you feel about that?

J'NAYA: One hundred percent sure I'm a fan.

NEEVA: You know I was asking about the sensors, right?

J'NAYA: Yep. We'll find the captain alright, although I do have to report that Strategos Synoll is a terrible liar.

NEEVA: How do you mean?

J'NAYA: They told us they wanted these sensor upgrades to improve exploration, communication, and traffic control throughout this system and the Tulian colony worlds.

NEEVA: Yes, and?

J'NAYA: And we'll get there... eventually. But Synoll and the entire Science ministry are prioritizing all the wrong components. At first, I thought it was just a mistake. Then I thought maybe their science is too primitive for this kind of engineering project. Then I realized: their priority list makes sense if the main thing they want to build isn't an extrasolar observatory.

NEEVA: So what are they building? We building?

J'NAYA: Planetary surveillance net. They're trying to keep a closer eye on their own ships, their own atmosphere, maybe their own people. Which is perfectly fine. The Federation's planetary traffic controls do the same basic things. Nothing nefarious about that!

NEEVA: But if what they're doing is perfectly innocent...

J'NAYA: Exactly. Why lie about it?

NEEVA: Hm. (pause) I'll talk to Jerrin, see what I can dig up. In the meantime, this isn't getting in the way of us finding the captain and First Officer Lorhrok?

J'NAYA: No. I mean, every time they try to skip past something that would help our long-range scanners, I just quietly go fix it. I'm sure Synoll has noticed, but he hasn't tried to stop me.

NEEVA: So far. You know he's a liar and you'd still go on a date with him?

J'NAYA: All men lie, especially about politics.

NEEVA: Especially when they're politicians.

J'NAYA: I like to think he's a scientist first, but... with all due respect, Commander, have you noticed how cute he is?

NEEVA: Well, find out what you can from him.

J'NAYA: Of course, Neeva. I won't let the captain down.

NEEVA: They could be anywhere right now. The Jdaat could be jamming cattle brands on them, for all we know.

SCENE 4K-07**LOCATION: HOSPITAL**

("So This Is Christmas" by John Lennon, already midway into the song, is playing softly on tinny speakers in this small hospital room)

THE MAN: Alright. Wake them up.

ISLANDER #1: Which one first?

THE MAN: Mmmm... the tall one.

ISLANDER #1: Ten cc's *zolpax tartrate*.

(He injects it with a plastic syringe.)

LORHROK: (inhales suddenly, exhales slowly.) Hello. Where am I?

THE MAN: We were hoping you could answer a few questions for us, too.

LORHROK: Lorhrok, Alecz! Leftenant! Service number S-C-1-naught-8-P-[3-5-4-4-3-1-8!]

THE MAN: Hang on, Leftenant. Hang on. We didn't mean it like that. You're not a prisoner, you're not being interrogated.

LORHROK: Then why the restraints? And that music?

THE MAN: We had to tie you down to stop your thrashing while we set your broken legs. The music... the music is supposed to make you feel comfortable. Nurse, can you try the next track?

ISLANDER #1: Yes, right away.

(He presses the skip key on a boombox and suddenly Bing Crosby's "Jingle Bells" comes on.)

LORHROK: Agggh!

DOVAN: (groaning) Uhhn, Human music. I can confirm: this is torture.

THE MAN: Turn it off! Turn it off!

(The attendant turns it off.)

DOVAN: Where did you get that stuff?

THE MAN: Your starship has been in Perenalthorias space for a year. There have been some cultural exchanges, and many of the products have been shared with subscriber worlds. This music collection, however, is the only one posted on the open-source servers. We hoped that meant it was special.

DOVAN: Oh, it's special.

LORHROK: I've served with Cardassians who swore that the worst part of Reconstruction wasn't the mass starvation; it was when the human aid workers started playing Christmas music. Where are we? Who are you?

THE MAN: I'm the Man of the city of Kao. You're in my hospital, recovering from what should have been a highly fatal explosion, if you'd been sitting about five meters to the left. Kao sent search parties to the tunnels under Elpam as the island burned; they heard it and found you. Two questions, my turn.

DOVAN: I'm Captain Alcar Do[van of the United Starship *Excelsior*.]

THE MAN: Oh, no, I know who you are, Captain Dovan and Leftenant Lorhrok. They couldn't keep that off the open net. Not after the impression you left on Zathana. The spectacle you made in the Sernaix Sector. And I know why you're here: you must have heard our distress call.

DOVAN: Your distr[ess call?]

THE MAN: Ah ah! Still my turn! What I want to know is: you're clearly an advanced civilization. On your starship, do you, by any chance, possess what's called a... quantum computer?

LORHROK: Well, technically, we have one ri[ght here.]

DOVAN: Yes. On the *Excelsior*.

THE MAN: May we use it?

DOVAN: No. We aren't allowed to interfere.

THE MAN: Not even to save my people?

DOVAN: That's two. Our turn. Where's Neshent?

THE MAN: The Islander you were with.

LORHROK: Yes. Blue hair, red [wings.]

THE MAN: He was severely injured when we found him. The doctors tell me had more hemorrhages after the fall than bones. They did their best to save him, but...

DOVAN: Oh, no. (pause) He's dead?

THE MAN: What? No! If he'd died, wouldn't I have started with that? But he was badly hurt. Beyond our power. We can keep him alive for another day or two (exhale) but we can't save him. Not here.

DOVAN: Who can?

THE MAN: Hm? Oh, the Capitol has certain medicines. Licensed from the Divitians, of course. We can't afford them, though, and neither can Neshent. (pause) (claps his hands together) Now, do you have any scans of our atmosphere?

DOVAN: Alec?

LORHROK: Well, I downloaded some rough scans from the captain's yacht to the tricorders. Haven't checked to see if they were any good.

THE MAN: Would sharing that violate your non-interference agreement, Captain?

LORHROK: Well, I was going to say--they're out of power. Useless until we get back to the *Excelsior*.

THE MAN: We'll work on that. If--when we fix them, captain... can you spare an ailing nation a scan or two?

DOVAN: Quantum computers and scans are not the usual requests we get on first contact, Mister... uh, ... Man.

THE MAN: If you prefer: Man Sl!y'xpn.

DOVAN: I don't. Usually, people ask for transporters, warp drive, and guns. And not in that order.

THE MAN: You're aware, I believe, of our struggles to convince the Capitol that their engines are responsible for the skyfires that are killing the Islands.

DOVAN: Neshent filled us in. He also called you Island governors a pack of cowards.

THE MAN: Then I suppose we know who he voted for. But he's not all wrong. We've spent years petitioning the Capitol; they call us fantasists. Even the incineration of Ouieya, Cheeb, and now Elpam -- but apparently we're the ones imagining things.

DOVAN: So why keep trying if they're not listening?

THE MAN: That's a good question, Captain. But, recently, I learned something the Capitol has been keeping from the Islanders: the Divitians themselves have regulations against harming the environment with their technology. If we can only bring them evidence of what's happening here, they can deactivate the Capitol's engine licenses before the entire hemisphere is burnt away.

LORHROK: I'm not sure a couple of quick atmospheric scans from a burnt-out tricorder will hold up in court.

THE MAN: I only want them as corroboration. We're going to get our main evidence from the proverbial sleepwalker's wife. We have intelligence saying the Capitol knows even more about the skyfires than we do, and that they're working around the clock to keep it under wraps. A small team of ours is going to infiltrate one of the Capitol's supply depots on the coast and retrieve some of their data. Then the Divitians will have no choice but to put an end to this.

DOVAN: This supply depot... would they have any of the medicine Neshent needs?

THE MAN: Oh, undoubtedly. But it doesn't matter; the product license wouldn't allow them to treat an Islander with it. And the Capitol has committed itself to the principle that no single man's life is greater than all the lives depending on that license. They'd sooner die than treat your friend.

DOVAN: What if we stole some? Could your doctors administer it?

THE MAN: No, the treatment is delivered by nanites embedded in the *kromgel*. The nanites would simply shut down if injected without an activation key. I'm sorry, Captain. I had no idea your Federation cared so much for the fates of your lessers. You do honor to Neshent.

DOVAN: He's on a ventilator because of us; we'll do better than honor him. May we have the room for a minute, Man? I need to talk to my first officer.

THE MAN: Of course. Nurse?

(He leaves, as does the nurse behind him. They close a wooden door behind them.)

DOVAN: Are you fit to travel?

LORHROK: Not really, but I'm not letting you infiltrate a hostile supply depot on your own.

DOVAN: Your legs are broken.

LORHROK: Their bone-regeneration tech leaves a lot to be desired, but it's hardly barbarism. I can walk.

DOVAN: When we get there, can you override this infernal licensing scheme?

LORHROK: If I can get my tricorder working, probably. Now, I've a question for you: what about the Prime Directive?

DOVAN: We're not destroying their society. We're saving one man, getting medicine for Neshent. A man who's only dying because the Islanders sent out a distress call and the Capitol's pollution blew up our yacht.

LORHROK: They didn't exactly mean to.

DOVAN: Didn't mean to? Alecz, is it even conceivable that the Capitol doesn't know what it's doing to these people?

(Pause.)

LORHROK: No. The chemical reaction is really quite basic to anyone who grew up on a planet with free verterons floating around. If the Capitol has tetryon engines and says the skyfire isn't their fault, then the Capitol is lying.

DOVAN: Knowingly saturating the airspace around an outgoing distress call with a combustible explosive is tantamount to a direct attack on the *McKinley*. And, coincidentally, "tantamount" is the exact word used in Sub-Order Thirteen of the Prime Directive. The next paragraph allows us to engage in, quote, "minor interference that does not alter social development if necessary to survive or repair earlier interference." Besides, I really liked that yacht.

LORHROK: Do you always have an excuse? For breaking the rules you never intended to follow?

DOVAN: Let's hope so. Otherwise, I'm in real trouble.

SCENE 4K-08**LOCATION: THE AVIARY - TEMPORARY MEDICAL AREA**

SHARP: Thirty ceecees inaprovaline.

DOC OBOL: Ina-what-aline?

SHARP: (sigh) Just give me my medkit again.

DOC OBOL: Look, Doctor Melissa, you are from an advanced medical culture, and I am trying my best to learn [how I can save more lives.]

SHARP: Your patient is going into synaptic failure right now, Doctor Obol.

DOC OBOL: Sorry. (he picks up the medkit) Medkit.

(Sharp takes the medkit.)

SHARP: Thank you. (She keys a command into a hypospray and injects it into the patient.) That's just it, Obol. You have the technology, you have the economy, I can see you have the brains -- so why aren't you an advanced medical culture? Your surgical technique is fifty or sixty years behind where it should be for a society at your level.

DOC OBOL: Well, a lot of these drugs are licensed, [and that prevents us from really applying our best minds to it.]

SHARP: Don't give me that patent crap. She's stable. Let's move on.

(She closes her tricorder)

DOC OBOL: Five beds down, there's a patient triaged code black. Internal burns. But I think you can save her.

(They start walking)

SHARP: I'm not talking about what you got from the Divitians. You should just know about inaprovaline by now.

DOC OBOL: You don't think that has anything to do with the licensing?

(They get to the next patient, Sharp starts scanning again.)

SHARP: Oh, I think it has everything to do with the licensing. Just not in the way you think. Renting everything that makes your society go, never learning its guts, never building it yourselves... That'll cost a lot more than money, and I'm not talking about pride. Your - hang on. (tricorder alert) There it is again.

DOC OBOL: What?

SHARP: You said these people were hurt when a baffle plate on their transport's warp core ruptured, which caused a fire.

DOC OBOL: Yes, that's right.

SHARP: I thought it was just a fluke the first time. Maybe the woman we were treating was far enough away from the plate that she just got burned. And then I thought maybe my tricorder was acting up, but I switched to my auxiliary.

DOC OBOL: What are you talking about?

SHARP: Where are the theta burns?

DOC OBOL: The what?

SHARP: That close to an engine core of your type, their bodies should be scorched by radiation.

DOC OBOL: What are you talking about? Theta whatzit!

SHARP: You're a doctor in a warp-capable culture and you don't know about theta rays?

DOC OBOL: And I suppose you're going to condescend to explain it to me now!

SHARP: It's a kind of radiation that comes out of warp cores! And when your baffle plates blow up, people on the ship get a lot of it shot through every cell in their body!

DOC OBOL: I had no idea.

SHARP: These people weren't on a transport at all, were they? They got these burns somewhere else!

DOC OBOL: Doctor, please!

SHARP: That's why you're actually keeping them all unconscious, isn't it? Not to help them rest - to keep them from revealing the truth!

DOC OBOL: That's absurd.

SHARP: And when I take this tricorder and start scanning their epidermal layers for shrapnel, what am I going to find? Duranium bulkheads? Aluminum crystalfoam?

DOC OBOL: No. Brick. Masonry. Wood. Spackle, probably.

SHARP: Where did this many people get this badly burned?

DOC OBOL: Does it really matter, Doctor? They're our patients. They need our help if they're going to live.

(Pause.)

SHARP: You're right. Just tell me this: [are there any complicating factors here I need to know about?]

(An alert sounds.)

ALIEN COMPUTER VOICE: *Alert. Alert. Alert code white. (in background) Military personnel to combat posts. Alert code white. Prepare for assault.*

DOC OBOL: We need to get to a civilian shelter!

SHARP: A shelter against what?! I thought your people were at peace!

DOC OBOL: They might be coming up through the tunnels - we know they want the *kromgel*; we have to go!

(A big metal security door swings open uselessly on the other side of the room.)

ISLANDER #1: Not so fast! Freeze! In the name of the League of Islands and the victims of Elpam!

DOC OBOL: NO!

SHARP: Wha--?

ISLANDER #1: Hands where I can see them! Hands where I can see them NOW!!

DOVAN: No, WAIT!

(Long Pause.)

DOVAN: Melissa?

NARRATOR: *To be continued...*

END CREDITS

(End credits begin, then are abruptly interrupted by a cassette player.)

SHARP: Hi, my name's Melissa, and I've, well, gotten a lot out of this open-source cultural server and I just, uh, wanted to give something back. So... here's my contribution? Some really important music from my homeworld.

(End credits music replaced with "Just Like Christmas" by Low.)