

Starship: Excelsior

"Every Good Captain Has Admiral Issues"

(Season 3, Episode 1)

By James Heaney

Transcribed by Peter Stine

SCENE 301-01

(Silence)

(Computer beep.)

COMPUTER: *Automatic file decryption in progress. Segments of encrypted log entry are now available for playback. Timestamp: ten weeks ago. Would you like to begin playback?*

(Someone presses a key.)

COMPUTER: *Loading file. Please wait...*

(The computer processes, then begins playback)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE (TEN WEEKS AGO)

SURESH: Commander Cortez! Why don't you put down that phaser before somebody gets hurt?

(Cortez charges the phaser up higher.)

CORTEZ: No, I don't think so.

SURESH: Mister Rol! Relieve Captain Cortez of her sidearm!

ROL: I'm afraid I can't do that, sir.

CORTEZ: Captain Suresh, by the power vested in me as first officer of the *Starship Excelsior*, I hereby relieve you of command.

SURESH: (dismissive) On what grounds?

CORTEZ: We were ordered to sterilize this entire area if we found any specimens. You're talking about bringing them home with us!

SURESH: It's an inhumane order, Mister Cortez! An absurd one! We're not at war with these... creatures. In fact, I believe there is much we stand to learn from this new race.

CORTEZ: Wrong answer. Rol! Do you see it? On his neck?

ROL: Yes, ma'am, I do!

CORTEZ: That's all I needed. (sadly) Goodbye, Captain.

(She fires a longer sustained blast)

(Suresh grunts and collapses)

(Cortez presses a key.)

CORTEZ: Computer, confirm: Captain Sharvah C. Suresh has been killed in the line of duty this stardate. Transfer all *Excelsior* command codes to Cortez, Commander Rachel T.

COMPUTER: Termination confirmed. Command codes transferred.

ROL: Ma'am, what are your orders?

CORTEZ: My orders are Starfleet's. Take back this ship, then take a marine team and kill everything on the *Anbar*. And "Captain" will do fine, Lieutenant.

(There is a computer error sound.)

COMPUTER: Error! Error! File playback terminated. Decryption not complete. Please continue retrieval and decryption from *Excelsior* log recorder. Error! Error! File playback terminated. Decryption... (fades out)

SCENE 301-02**LOCATION: UNION III – COUNTRYSIDE**

(There are outdoor sounds as a shuttle idles. Dovan walks down towards Underwood.)

NARRATOR: *The Present Day.*

(Dovan stops.)

DOVAN: Good morning!

UNDERWOOD: Indeed it is! Are you my ride up to the *Excelsior*?

DOVAN: That depends. Are you the *Excelsior*'s new diplomat?

UNDERWOOD: (proudly) Underwood. Lieutenant Commander Joshua Underwood, Diplomatic Corps. (confused) And... forgive me if I'm wrong, but aren't you...?

DOVAN: I am. Alcar Dovan. Your new captain.

UNDERWOOD: I prefer to think of you as my successor. When they said they'd be sending a shuttle down to pick me up, I expected some poor crewman who'd drawn the short straw. Not... well. I didn't think my arrival merited the immediate attention of the C.O.

DOVAN: I like baggage.

UNDERWOOD: Which kind?

DOVAN: Mostly, the skeletons-in-the-closet variety.

UNDERWOOD: ...Well... I can't fault you for having questions. I take it you already know that I used to be the captain of the *Excelsior*.

DOVAN: So I've read. Then you punched Admiral Parker in the chin, got thrown out of Starfleet, and spent years chasing space myths in your own private starliner. And you were reinstated four days

ago, by special permission of Admiral Parker.

UNDERWOOD: Sounds like you're all studied up. So what did you want to know?

DOVAN: Just one thing. What are you doing here?

UNDERWOOD: Back in Starfleet?

DOVAN: Back on my ship.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: That's direct. To the point. I like it. Partly, Dovan, I'm here to redeem myself. I was on this ship when I was forced into retire-- (sigh — more talking to himself) No, dammit, now I sound like my damn therapist. I *disgraced* myself on this ship. Punched the lights out of an Admiral because I thought he had it in for me. But, I admit... *mostly* I'm here because I understand there's a job opening on your bridge.

DOVAN: Which job is that?

UNDERWOOD: The one that comes with the office on Deck One.

DOVAN: I'm afraid that position's been filled.

UNDERWOOD: Really? By whom?

DOVAN: Me, Commander.

UNDERWOOD: Oh. I had assumed you were just keeping the seat warm — a temporary assignment. I mean, no offense intended. It's just your level of experience led me--

DOVAN: None taken, Commander. Let me help me with your bags. And maybe on the way you can tell me about the old days on the *Excelsior*.

(They pick up Underwood's luggage and walk back towards the shuttle.)

DOVAN: I understand, for instance, that you were intimately involved in the resolution of the Reydovan Crisis.

UNDERWOOD: Actually, Dovan — much as I would love to bore you to death with a complete genealogy of the House of Deveneaux — could you tell me something about the *Excelsior's* new mission? I heard you moved up the launch window this morning.

DOVAN: Right. I don't think the *Excelsior* needs another week to get underway. We slip the surly bonds of spacedock tonight, at eighteen hundred.

UNDERWOOD: That's not just wanderlust, is it?

DOVAN: (becoming serious) No. No, it's not.

(Underwood and Dovan reach the shuttle doors. They both clamber through, closing the hatch behind them.)

LOCATION: MUZTAG SHUTTLE COCKPIT

DOVAN: Alright, Major. Fire it up. We're going home!

THE MAJOR: Sir, yes sir!

(The Major presses some buttons. The shuttle revs up to full and lifts off.)

DOVAN: (to Underwood) Now let's get you settled in in the rear compartment. We can talk there.

UNDERWOOD: Right.

(Dovan opens a door right in front of him and they pass into the rear compartment. The door closes behind them.)

LOCATION: MUZTAG REAR COMPARTMENT

UNDERWOOD: Nice shuttle. They didn't have this model when I was captain.

DOVAN: New this year. Just set your bags down anywhere you like. It's not a long ride back to the *Excelsior*.

(Underwood does so.)

UNDERWOOD: You were saying? About the mission?

DOVAN: Yes. Hm.

UNDERWOOD: What?

DOVAN: Our mission... Sharing this knowledge is dangerous.

UNDERWOOD: I'm not afraid of it.

DOVAN: Not dangerous to you; dangerous to us. ...But, then, I guess you're one of "us" now. Which means you're part of this, like it or not. Alright, Underwood. I'll be honest. The *Excelsior* has had a rough time. We lost a lot of good people on a planet called Valandria – some in battle, some from a plague. As you are apparently aware, one of the dead was Captain Cortez. Then, last week, a man from Starfleet Intelligence, named General Brahms, killed a few more officers before we brought him to justice. We've also discovered that, ten weeks ago, the *Excelsior* went on a secret mission. A lot of people died there, too. Captain Cortez was on that mission, and, for reasons that aren't clear to us, at some point she shot the captain dead and seized command of the *Excelsior*. In short, the *Excelsior* has been hemorrhaging lives ever since she came out of mothballs. And, as it turns out, all of those deaths - Valandria, the Brahms murders, the secret mission – they all happened in order to protect a military secret. Captain Cortez called it "the Anbar". Brahms called it "the Sword of Damocles." Whatever it is, hundreds of people have died so Intelligence could protect it. And we have no reason to believe they're finished.

UNDERWOOD: Those codenames. Do you have any idea what they mean?

DOVAN: None. And that's our mission: The *Excelsior*'s crew is not going to be the plaything of General Brahms's people anymore. We're going on the offensive against the Sword of Damocles, whatever or wherever it is. We're going to find out what it is... and then we're going to put a stop to it.

UNDERWOOD: You'd better have something more than a codename if you want to pull *that* off.

DOVAN: We do. On her deathbed, Captain Cortez gave me a few clues – clues she wanted me to follow up. She said it was vital. I believe her. I spent this week looking for more information. I finished this morning. Now we're leaving.

UNDERWOOD: Heh. I'll bet that wreaked (read: "reeked") hell on Starbase's departures schedule.

DOVAN: Well... it will as soon as I get Admiral Parker's launch authorization.

UNDERWOOD: What? You're launching in ten hours and you don't have *permission* yet?

DOVAN: Admiral Parker and I... haven't seen eye-to-eye on this. We'll get it squared away before launch time, I'm sure. (grumbling) One way or another.

UNDERWOOD: Dovan – don't do anything...

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Pardon? Don't do anything... what?

UNDERWOOD: Just... don't do anything to make my ship look bad, Dovan.

DOVAN: *My* ship, Commander. And you can call me "sir." I'm fine with "Captain," too, but no more of this "Dovan."

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: You really *don't* want me on the *Excelsior*, do you?

DOVAN: Honestly, I haven't made up my mind yet. Well, make yourself comfortable; we'll be arriving in a few minutes. Do you need anything else?

UNDERWOOD: Not just now, Dovan.

(Tense pause.)

DOVAN: Hm.

(Dovan turns and exits to the cockpit.)

UNDERWOOD: Keep ignoring Admiral Parker and you'll end up like me, Dovan. But, then, I think that's the plan. Admiral Parker brought me back to Starfleet for a reason. I think he has made up his mind about you. I think I'm getting your chair.

LOCATION: MUZTAG COCKPIT

(Dovan enters and walks to the front.)

DOVAN: (grinning broadly) Major!

THE MAJOR: Sir!

(Dovan throws himself into the co-pilot's seat.)

DOVAN: Thanks for the ride back to Spacedock. On New Year's Day, no less.

THE MAJOR: Sir — of course, sir!

DOVAN: I don't think we've been formally introduced. I'm Commander Dovan, of course. Congratulations on your promotion to head of the *Excelsior* marine detachment. They're going to need a steady hand at the CONN to recover from their losses at Valandria.

THE MAJOR: Sir, they're good men. They deserve the best. And they're going to get it, sir.

DOVAN: I expect no less. Now, um, this may sound a bit odd, but... who exactly are you?

THE MAJOR: Sir, I'm a Starfleet marine with the rank of Major. I've sworn my life to the defense of crew and country, and I will do anything to ensure your safety. Sir!

DOVAN: I meant your name, Major.

THE MAJOR: Sir, you asked me who I am, sir!

DOVAN: Alright, then. I guess I'll call you "Major."

THE MAJOR: Sir, yes, sir!

DOVAN: ...right.

(Incoming hail beep.)

THE MAJOR: Sir, incoming transmission from Admiral —

DOVAN: I've got it. (He presses a button.) Admiral Parker! What can I do for you?

PARKER: *Commander Dovan. I heard a rumor just now that you're planning to launch the Excelsior. Tonight.*

DOVAN: For once, Admiral, the rumor mill is right on target. I await your authorization codes.

PARKER: *Dovan... We've been over this.*

DOVAN: And we're about to go over it again.

PARKER: *The Sword of Damocles is our concern, Commander. Not yours. We have your report, and all the details we need to assign another starship to--*

DOVAN: Yeah, I've been thinking about that, Admiral. I checked the Task Force bulletins last night. Turns out, every ship in our jurisdiction is occupied right now. So may I ask which particular starship has been assigned to our mission?

PARKER: *I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to discuss that.*

DOVAN: Has another starship been assigned?

(Pause.)

PARKER: *...I'm not able to discuss that, either.*

DOVAN: I see. Admiral - with all due respect — even discounting the importance Captain Cortez placed on this mission, the urgency with which she passed it on to me... I have the safety of my own crew to think about, and you're throwing up stone walls just because... well, I don't even know why.

PARKER: *No stone walls, Commander. I'm just... allocating the Task Force's resources--*

DOVAN: Right. Yeah. I've heard that one before, and it still hasn't convinced either one of us. Look, sir, if there's anything about the Anbar that you haven't told me —

PARKER: *Commander, you will not discuss the Anbar on an open channel.*

DOVAN: Then where can you discuss it?

PARKER: *(sigh) Alright. I'll get back to you, Commander. I need to find room in my schedule for a face-to-face conference.*

DOVAN: I look forward to the opportunity, sir.

PARKER: *I'll talk to you later, Commander. Parker out.*

(Comm goes dead.)

DOVAN: (tired sigh)

THE MAJOR: Sir?

DOVAN: Nothing, Major. Just... admiral issues. Let's go home.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The shuttle accelerates and swoops past, veering to port as it rises from the planet toward Starbase 911 – and home.)

OPENING CREDITS

NARRATOR: *Star Trek: Excelsior is proud to present... Season Three... The Sword of Damocles. Episode One: Every Good Captain Has Admiral Issues*

SCENE 301-03**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR SHUTTLEBAY**

(The shuttlebay bustles as an alarm goes off.)

COMPUTER: (in background) *Clear the deck. Clear the deck. Shuttle inbound. Decompression alert. Clear the deck.*

LOCATION: SHUTTLE COCKPIT

(The Major and Dovan work the controls.)

THE MAJOR: Sir -- final approach to the *Excelsior*, sir.

DOVAN: Roger that.

(Underwood enters.)

DOVAN: Mister Underwood. Come on up here. You might want to take a look at this.

(Underwood steps to the forward window.)

UNDERWOOD: My god. The ship. She's... she's beautiful.

DOVAN: Yes. Yes, she is.

UNDERWOOD: Part of me wonders... does she still remember?

DOVAN: I don't think she ever forgets.

UNDERWOOD: I almost hope you're wrong.

DOVAN: Almost. But not quite.

UNDERWOOD: No. Not quite.

THE MAJOR: Summit LSO, three-zero-four-one, final approach. Call the ball.

EXCELSIOR LSO: *Three-zero-four-one, steady on-course, point-seven-five kay-em. Call the ball.*

THE MAJOR: One-one Flyer ball five-seven.

EXCELSIOR LSO: *Roger ball.*

(Comm ends.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR SHUTTLEBAY

(The shuttle swoops in for docking, passing through the forcefield, slowing, then hovering to the floor. Big, loud, clamps settle down onto it from below.)

COMPUTER: (in background) *Clear the deck. Clear the deck. Shuttle inbound. Decompression alert. Clear the deck.*

LOCATION: SHUTTLE COCKPIT

(The Major presses buttons while Dovan stands.)

DOVAN: Nice landing, Major.

THE MAJOR: Sir, thank you, sir.

(The Major continues powering down. Dovan begins to exit.)

UNDERWOOD: I'm going to grab my bags, find my quarters, then.

DOVAN: I assume you know the way?

UNDERWOOD: That would be an understatement.

DOVAN: Alright, then. Scram. Er... dismissed. Whatever.

(The ramp is lowered and they both exit the shuttle.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR SHUTTLEBAY

NEEVA: (calling from a little distance over the din of the flight deck) Captain Dovan, sir!

(Dovan stops where he is as she closes the distance between them.)

DOVAN: Hullo! That's me! You know, I'm terrible with faces, but I think you must be new here.

NEEVA: I am. Your new chief of operations. Lieutenant Commander Neeva, reporting for duty.

DOVAN: Oh, good. I'd hate to think I'd forgotten a green crewmember. Walk with me.

(They walk toward the exit.)

DOVAN: I didn't know there were any Orion women in Starfleet at the moment.

NEEVA: I've been in the fleet since I was nineteen, sir, so I wouldn't call it a new development.

DOVAN: It's a big fleet, Commander. Its hard enough just keeping track of the pink-skins. How does that work, exactly? Orion women produce the most powerful natural pheromones in the known galaxy. Even the Deltans look up to you. I have to imagine all those chemicals would make it... difficult... to do your job.

NEEVA: (sighs) I'm prescribed pheromone suppressants — they're regulation. There are many things that make working with men difficult, but chemicals aren't one of them.

DOVAN: You have a problem with men, Commander? Because - I hate to break it to you - but we're about fifty percent male here on the *Excelsior*.

NEEVA: Fifty-two percent, actually. And forty-four percent female, according to your latest operations report.

DOVAN: I'm impressed. The question stands.

NEEVA: With all due respect, sir, I've never had a male C.O. I didn't hate.

(Dovan stops in his tracks suddenly.)

DOVAN: Their fault or yours?

NEEVA: I wouldn't be a lieutenant commander right now if I weren't an excellent officer. (Pause)
Theirs.

DOVAN: And how am I looking to you so far? Speak freely.

NEEVA: Speaking freely... I suspect that when you start acting like your personnel file, you'll join that club.

DOVAN: What, the medals don't look good to you?

NEEVA: Have I mentioned how big a fan I am of the Starfleet Code of Conduct?

DOVAN: Well, I guess somebody has to be.

NEEVA: I think that tells me what I need to know, sir.

DOVAN: Welcome aboard, Commander. Now that we've got the social niceties out of the way, I'd like to hear your report.

(He starts walking again toward the doors. Neeva follows and starts clicking through pads.)

NEEVA: Starting with the... department heads' reports, sir, or the quartermaster's inventory?

DOVAN: Hm. Let's skip to the executive summary. Are we going to launch on time?

NEEVA: That depends, sir, on... on ten dozen different variables that might--

DOVAN: Best guess, Commander.

NEEVA: (reluctant) Eighteen hundred hours. We may be ready by then.

DOVAN: Good. Do your best. It's all I can ask. Have we gotten the hellfire torpedoes unloaded yet?

NEEVA: Most, sir. But we still have... (clicks her padd) forty-seven left onboard.

DOVAN: Hm. I need you to reassign those teams.

NEEVA: Sir? We're under legal obligation-

DOVAN: I know about the treaty, Commander. And nobody wants to get rid of our hellfire torpedoes more than I do. Damn things are weapons of mass destruction. We're a ship of peace, and no ship of peace should carry the firepower to glass a planet three times over. But I need those men right now for a special assignment. Which makes this... an order. We'll get to the rest of the hellfires as soon as we can.

(They exit the shuttlebay.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

NEEVA: Can I at least ask what you'll be assigning those teams to, sir?

DOVAN: No, Commander Neeva, I'm sorry. You will have them report directly to me in thirty minutes. That's all.

(She makes the corrections on her padd.)

NEEVA: Well, I do love a challenge.

DOVAN: Then you're going to fit in very well here. Speaking of challenges, I do have one other thing for you.

NEEVA: Go ahead.

DOVAN: I need you to requisition a flux chiller for the warp nacelles by dinner time. Stow it in the ion

pod.

NEEVA: A flux chiller, sir? Those haven't been in general use in more than fifty years.

DOVAN: I know. But I'd like to have one on board, just in case. A flux chiller could save the ship if, say, the plasma safeties failed. Rock beats scissors; paper beats rock; flux chiller beats plasma cascade.

NEEVA: Sir, in order for that to happen, no fewer than seven redundant safety interlocks would have to fail almost simultaneously. The odds against that...

DOVAN: Yours not to reason why, Commander. Yours just to do and die. This is also an order. Again: Welcome aboard the *Starship Excelsior*, Commander. I hope you find your time here... surprising.

NEEVA: That would be... a nice change, sir.

DOVAN: Dismissed.

NEEVA: Sir.

(Neeva walks down another corridor. Dovan enters a turbolift.)

DOVAN: Deck one. (Dovan taps his combadge) Lorhrok, this is Dovan. Are we still on time for the launch tonight?

LORHROK: *Morning, captain. You bet your spots we're on time, sir. Launch sims are starting to shape up; we should have a green light for you by mid-afternoon. Although... The hellfire torpedoes are giving us... well, a hell of a time, sir, if you'll excuse a pun.*

DOVAN: Excuse them? Lieutenant, I positively encourage them. But the hellfires are no longer a priority.

LORHROK: *Sir--*

DOVAN: Yeah, I know. I'll explain later.

LORHROK: *I'm grateful to have them out of my hair. What'd you think of Neeva?*

DOVAN: I'm afraid our relationship so far is a lot like the relationship I already have with Yubari and Adow. Tense.

LORHROK: *You said something stupid, didn't you?*

DOVAN: I don't think so, but, I have to admit, I'm starting to feel like a chauvinist around here.

LORHROK: *You get along well enough with Doctor Sharp.*

DOVAN: Thanks for the vote of confidence, Alecz.

LORHROK: *Any time.*

DOVAN: News from Parker.

LORHROK: *Oh? What's he want?*

DOVAN: Still trying to reassign us. Today I found out he's not actually planning to send anyone in our place.

LORHROK: *What, and leave the Anbar and the Sword of Damocles out there? Letting good men and women die whenever somebody falls afoul of Brahms's people?*

DOVAN: That seems to be the plan.

LORHROK: *It's a bad plan.*

DOVAN: I know.

LORHROK: *Is he at least giving us launch clearance?*

DOVAN: Not yet.

LORHROK: *(sigh)* Are you calling to have me schedule the launch for next week after all?

DOVAN: No. I'm asking if you'd like to bet on it.

LORHROK: *Bet on what?*

DOVAN: One bottle of brandy says I get us around the red tape and we leave spacedock on schedule.

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR ENGINEERING

LORHROK: You want to circumvent a fresh wall of admiral's tape in less than twelve hours?
(chuckles) You're on, sir. Absolutely.

DOVAN: *Excellent. No better motivation than a bet with my first mate. Thank you, Lieutenant. Dovan out.*

(Comm line is terminated.)

SIMON WESTLAKE: Chief, I'm alright! I don't need your--

ADOW: Look! You've got the calibration sensors off by a dozen microns! If--

(The panel starts sparking.)

ADOW: Great. Now look what you've--

WESTLAKE: You just shifted my baseline without asking me first! Of course--!

ADOW: Look, Simon, if you want to succeed on the *Excelsior*, you're going to have to--

LORHROK: (sniffs) What's that smell? Chief Adow! A word!

(Adow breaks off and ambles up to Lorhrok.)

ADOW: I don't know what I'm going to do with Westlake there, sir. He doesn't have the training for this job, and we're an active engineering department, not a charity school.

LORHROK: Simon Westlake is new, but he's not stupid. You, on the other hand--

ADOW: Speaking of newbies, I think Ensign Ermez needs a few remedial classes. He's been making elementary mistakes all week. I hope he's good at decryption, because he's been useless down here.

LORHROK: Phillippe Ermez is one of my favorite newbies. If the "mistakes" you mean are the same kind you just caused for Mister Westlake...

ADOW: I mean... I mean, this morning, I had to walk Ermez through the magnetic cold-start sequence myself. He couldn't remember how it started.

LORHROK: So instead of giving him a hint to start him off, you--

ADOW: Or how it ended.

LORHROK: Look, Chief, let me put this indelicately: how much of this is Ensign Ermez, and how much of it is your own control issues?

ADOW: What kind of a question is that? Whatever "control issues" I have don't get in the way of--

LORHROK: I'm certain you feel that way, Chief, but... look. With me now doubling as the first officer, I know you're under a lot more pressure here in engineering as my number two than you're used to. It makes sense that you'd push for everything in here to be perfect, even when--

ADOW: Sir, that's not what's happening here!

LORHROK: Alright, calm down, Adow. Alright, let's... Ensign Ermez! Front and center!

ERMEZ: Sir!

(Ermez comes running from a level above.)

LORHROK: Pop quiz, Phillipe. Give me the current status of the warp engines, full summary.

ERMEZ: Right, sir. Uh...

LORHROK: No peeking.

ERMEZ: I know, sir. Um... intermix ratio at zero-point-eight and rising. Magnetic constrictor coils locked in the first through eighth rings, except the fifth; there's a D-ring diode —

(Adow checks his answers with her PADD.)

LORHROK: Good enough, Ensign. What's the measure of the dilithium fracture?

ERMEZ: Two point eight, sir. Nanometers, sir.

LORHROK: (to Adow) That all check out?

ADOW: Well, yes, but it's not what I--

LORHROK: Thank you, Ermez. That'll do. Back to work.

ERMEZ: Thank you, sir!

(He crisply pivots and returns to work)

LORHROK: (to Adow) Trust me on this one.

ADOW: I don't trust officers.

LORHROK: Alright. Then take a look at these two pips. Either way, you're leaving Ermez where he is. I have to go check in with T'Kala and Harkless. They're decoding the encrypted sections of the *Excelsior* log recorder, trying to get a few more details on the secret mission ten weeks ago, and I heard they've made some progress they'd like me to see before--

(Intercomm chime.)

DOVAN: *Dovan to Lohrok. Drop whatever you're doing and meet me on Deck Two.*

LORHROK: (sigh) Or not. (He taps his combadge) Lohrok here, sir. Can this wait?

DOVAN: *Admiral Parker's able to meet us early. He's beaming over now.*

LORHROK: I understand. I'll be right up. Lohrok out. (sighs again) Well, I guess Mr. Harkless's report will have to wait.

ADOW: Isn't Ermez supposed to relieving Harkless on log recorder duty right now?

LORHROK: Adow--

ADOW: I'm not joking, sir! Here's the manifest you signed this morning.

(She hands him a padd, clicking some buttons as she does so.)

LORHROK: Oh. I guess you win this one, Chief. (calling out) Ermez!

ERMEZ: Sir!

LORHROK: Get down to the log recorder and relieve Harkless. Tell him I'll be by to hear his report in a little while. I'll see you later, Adow. (as he's walking away) And go a little easier on them!

ADOW: You want me to go easy, or do you want this ship to launch on schedule?

(Lohrok enters the turbolift.)

ADOW: Bugger.

SCENE 301-04**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CONFERENCE ROOM**

(Dovan enters, Lorhrok behind him.)

DOVAN: Admiral.

LORHROK: Admiral.

PARKER: Mister Dovan. I don't recall inviting your first officer.

DOVAN: And I don't recall inviting my diplomat. Underwood, what are you doing here?

UNDERWOOD: I was just telling the Admiral--

PARKER: Lieutenant Commander Underwood was just expressing some concerns to me about your attitude toward my orders.

DOVAN: What sort of "concerns", Underwood?

UNDERWOOD: Only that--

PARKER: It would seem, Mister Dovan, that you've chosen to keep your ship on a launch footing, as if you were leaving spacedock tonight... instead of next week.

DOVAN: You denied my request for immediate departure. You gave me no order to stop preparing for departure.

PARKER: No explicit order. But my intentions were clear.

DOVAN: Intentions wouldn't convict me in a court-martial.

PARKER: Unfortunately, Commander, if you continue treating my orders as suggestions, that is precisely where we are going to end up.

DOVAN: Your orders make it impossible for me to protect my crew.

UNDERWOOD: Come on, Dovan. We all know the *Excelsior* is safe as long as she's in spacedock. It's going after this Anbar thing that puts you in danger.

LORHROK: That's not true, Commander! You weren't here! You weren't here when Amara was murdered! You weren't here when there were kidnappings, and mind control, firefights in the corridors and bombs going off in the shield grid! I have a friend named Alex Rol. He's gone. I don't know where. I don't know if I'll ever see him again. I don't know if he's alive or dead! But he paid for General Brahms's sins. He may still pay the ultimate price. And if we don't use his sacrifice to purchase our freedom from Brahms, our freedom from the Sword of Damocles – whatever it is – then it was for nothing. We need to do this mission, whatever the risks. For them – and for us.
(pause) Sorry, sirs.

DOVAN: (quieter) Don't worry about it, Alecz.

PARKER: Commendably impassioned, Lieutenant Lorhrok. I will now speak with Commander Dovan. Alone.

(Underwood stands.)

UNDERWOOD: Sir.

LORHROK: Sir.

(They move toward the exit. As Underwood passes, Dovan stops him.)

DOVAN: Underwood. When did Mister Fisticuffs turn into a walking rulebook?

UNDERWOOD: Two years chasing ghosts in the star desert while somebody else gets your chair on the *Excelsior*... it's a sort of penance. I've gotten a second chance, Dovan. I intend to use it.

DOVAN: Right.

(Dovan releases him. Underwood exits.)

DOVAN: I knew his assignment was no accident. But I never guessed he was your spy.

PARKER: Officially, he isn't. All I've done is approved his two-year-old request for reinstatement and given him a posting here. If anything, I've encouraged him not to pursue higher rank.

DOVAN: But you knew how he'd react to being posted back here, to his old ship.

PARKER: Of course. Commander Underwood wants your seat back more than life itself. And if you do anything that gives him an excuse to take it from you... he will.

DOVAN: And if I don't give him an excuse?

PARKER: Then Mister Underwood is going to be very frustrated indeed.

DOVAN: Pardon my frankness, but that's pretty damned cynical, Admiral.

PARKER: Cynical? Commander, you did fantastic work here last week. I was very pleased with the apprehension of Isaac Brahms, and for that reason I did not stand in the way of your extremely irregular promotion by Captain Cortez at her deathbed. But I am not an idiot, Commander. Your record is one of the most heavily reprimanded in Starfleet. You're insubordinate and self-righteous. Now, those qualities have made some great Starfleet captains. I'm very optimistic about your future, Commander. But not this time. This time, I need you to follow my orders. Commander Underwood is my guarantee that you will.

DOVAN: You put me in an impossible position, Admiral. I don't really want this job – but as long as I'm in it, my first duty is to my crew, not to my orders. And, I know I'm starting to sound like a broken hologram, but your orders put my crew at risk.

PARKER: (beat; bites his lip) I understand, Commander. I'm not a nice man. Polite. Not nice. But I like to think that I am at least a just man, and you have the right to a guarantee. So I'll give it to you. Mister Dovan, based on what I've learned from interrogating General Brahms this week, I give you my word that, as long as you are in Spacedock, no harm will come to your crew or your vessel.

And I give you my word that, if you leave General Brahms and the Sword of Damocles behind – if you leave it to us – it will never trouble you or your crew again. Is that enough for you?

(Beat.)

DOVAN: What about Captain Cortez's orders?

PARKER: Captain Cortez was wrong. I don't know why she told you to go after the Anbar. She was wrong.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Alright, Admiral. You have a deal. (chuckles) Oh, you should have seen what I was planning to--

(The ship rocks and the red alert klaxon goes off.)

DOVAN: Great Bird. Dovan to Lorhrok!

(The combadge doesn't work.)

DOVAN: Dovan to Lorhrok!

(Again, it fails.)

DOVAN: Dovan to bridge! Report!

YUBARI: *Yubari here, sir! Explosion on Deck Sixteen, near the housing for the log recorder! Cause unknown!*

DOVAN: Damage!

YUBARI: *Minor, sir, but the log recorder is gone. And... we've lost Ensign T'Kala's lifesigns.*

DOVAN: No!

YUBARI: *I'm sorry, sir. Biosensors show that Ensign Ermez is still alive, but just barely. And he's under two thousand kilos of rubble. Emergency teams are converging, but...*

DOVAN: I understand. Meet me down there, Lieutenant. I have a feeling we're going to be needing your services again. Dovan out.

PARKER: Commander, I--

DOVAN: Shut up, Admiral. And get off my ship.

SCENE 301-05**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(Quieter alert klaxons have started. Lohrok and Harkless are running down the corridor.)

LORHROK: Ermez! T'Kala! (pause.) Harkless! Help me get this wreckage off them!

HARKLESS: Sir, the fire--

(Lorhrok touches one of the beams and recoils in pain.)

LORHROK: Ah! You're right: the debris is too hot to lift. Why hasn't the fire suppression system kicked in yet?

HARKLESS: I don't know! Could be... the EPS conduit got knocked out in the explosion!

LORHROK: If that were the case, there'd be a whole lot less deck and a whole lot more hard vacuum where you're standing, Harkless.

LORHROK: But let's check the power grid anyw — ow!

HARKLESS: Sir! It's too hot right there! Maybe we should--

LORHROK: No, I've got it! You're — *ow!* — you were right, Harkless. It's... the EPS conduit is fine, but the capillaries were burned out through this whole bulkhead. Attempting to bypass... Got it!

(Forcefields snap into place, quickly starving the fires of oxygen.)

LORHROK: (big, relieved, yet pained sigh) And the forcefields snap into place and starve the fire of oxygen. Brilliant. Doesn't help my hands, but... Now, Harkless, let's move this rubble! Lorhrok to Damage Control Teams: where are you?

HARKLESS: But, sir, your hands--

LORHROK: Nothing a dermal regenerator won't fix. Come on; T'Kala and Ermez may need our help.

(Adow comes barrelling down the corridor now, three engineers with equipment carts close behind.)

ADOW: Damage Control Team on your six, Lorhrok! Mitchells, hoses! Thelin, anti-gravs! Let's go, people!

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #2: Activating hoses!

(The hoses turn on, dousing the boiling-hot debris with a cooling agent.)

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #3: Anti-gravs!

(They all start removing debris. Eventually, they reach Ermez.)

ERMEZ: (groans)

LORHROK: Ermez! Ensign!

ADOW: Unconscious. Looks like he's got a broken leg. Medkit?

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #3: Medkit.

(Adow opens it up.)

LOHROK: Wait. What about T'Kala? She's still under there.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #2: (in background) Help me with this one, Thelin.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #3: (in background) We're gonna need another antigrav. Crewman?

HARKLESS: (in background) Let me put this one down... first. Okay. I'm ready.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #2: (in background) Alright, on four.

RANDOM #2, RANDOM #3, and HARKLESS: (in background) One. Two. Three. FOUR!

RANDOM CREWMEBER #3: (in background) Mitch, call down to Engineering and make sure they're sending more antigravs with the second team.

RANDOM CREWMEMBER #2: (in background) Will do.

ADOW: Didn't you get word from the bridge? T'Kala's dead, Boss.

LORHROK: No... No, I hadn't heard.

ADOW: Well, so's Ermez if we can't stabilize his vitals.

LORHROK: Let me have a go of it. I might--

SHARP: (calling out – at a pretty good distance.) That won't be necessary, Alec!

LORHROK: Doctor. Thank God.

SHARP: Less thanking, more getting out of my way. (pause) Thank you.

(Sharp crouches by Ermez and begins a tricorder scn)

SHARP: Oh, no.

LORHROK: What is it, Doctor?

SHARP: Mike, load this man on a stretcher. Quick.

NURSE HENNESSY: Right away, Melissa.

SHARP: What about T'Kala? Is she confirmed... confirmed dead?

LORHROK: We read no lifesigns here. It'll be a few minutes before we can dig down to the body to be sure.

SHARP: Right. (pause) Alright. Ermez can't wait for treatment. I'm going to take him down to sickbay. If you find T'Kala, and she's alive, let me know immediately. Understood?

LORHROK: Perfectly, Doctor. What about Ermez? Is he going to be alright?

(Pause.)

SHARP: No, he's not. His injuries are too severe. He'll be dead before we reach sickbay.

LORHROK: Then why--?

SHARP: Because I am a fighter, Alec. Alright! Let's get Phillippe out of here and onto a biobed! We don't have much time, so run!

(The medical team rushes away, passing a newly arriving Dovan and Yubari.)

DOVAN: Doctor, are they--?

SHARP: No time to talk! Sorry!

(Dovan and Yubari approach the wreckage.)

DOVAN: Lorchrok. What have we learned about the explosive so far?

LORHROK: Explosive, sir? Is that what caused this? Sir, was this deliberate?

DOVAN: It's a suspicion. So, the answer to my question is... not much.

LORHROK: We've been busy trying to get Ensign Ermez to sickbay, sir.

DOVAN: You made the right decision. And Ensign T'Kala?

LORHROK: The entire damage control team is looking for her.

CHIEF LORTH: (in background) Damage Control Alpha, this is Damage Beta reporting for duty.

ADOW: (in background) Great, kid. You remembered your callsign. Now unload some antigravs and start digging. There may just be a Vulcan woman still alive down there!

CHIEF LORTH: (in background) I pray you're right. Isakson, give me a hand!

DOVAN: Alright. Then that's the best we can do for the moment. How about the three of us take a look at this log recorder, then?

(Dovan, Lorhrok, and Yubari climb over some wreckage to the big hole in the bulkhead where the log recorder was before the explosion tore it apart.)

DOVAN: Or what's left of it. I need to know everything there is to know about this bomb, in case there's another one somewhere else on my ship.

(Yubari gets her tricorder out, starts scanning and quickly gets an alert.)

LORHROK: Why are you so sure this was a bombing, captain?

YUBARI: Because it was a bombing, Lieutenant. Look at my tricorder.

LORHROK: Traces of triphosphorous solinium.

DOVAN: The artificial compound that General Brahms's people always put in their bombs. Damn. I thought this was over.

YUBARI: It's Brahms. It's never over.

DOVAN: For a short time today, I lost sight of that. We can't escape this.

(Lorhrok picks up some plasticky shards of casing fragments.)

LORHROK: Now, this is interesting.

DOVAN: What've you found?

LORHROK: I was wondering how a bomb could damage one of these log recorders. No matter how big a bomb you're using, the surfaces of these things are made of solid neutronium. They've been known to take a direct hit from a photon torpedo and survive intact.

DOVAN: So how'd they do it?

LORHROK: From what I can tell from the blast pattern... somebody got the bomb inside the casing.

DOVAN: How is that possible? We only opened it for the first time yesterday, and we've had at least two if not three engineers on shift in front of it at all times since then. I assume one of them would have noticed a terrorist sticking a bomb in the casing.

YUBARI: I'll check the security logs.

LORHROK: And I'll check with the other engineers assigned to the log recorder, see if they noticed anything out of the ordinary.

YUBARI: Lorchrok, I'll need your help later with the forensics investigation.

LORHROK: Of course.

DOVAN: You'll have to put that on hold until after the mission briefing.

LORHROK: The mission briefing? Sir, I assumed that, after this--

DOVAN: Whoever did this, they hit the log recorder. Only the log recorder. That means there was something on there that they didn't want us to find. And that makes it all the more important that we start this mission. We. Launch. Today. (lightly) Or else I'm out a bottle of Saurian brandy.

YUBARI: Sir, does that mean we finally got launch authorization?

DOVAN: No. But, after this...

YUBARI: What if he doesn't?

LORHROK: What, after two bombings in his spacedock? He has to give us permission to investigate.

DOVAN: I... wouldn't be sure of that.

LORHROK: What?

YUBARI: Sir, if he doesn't give us those codes--

LORHROK: --I might be able to write a computer virus to sabotage Spacedoors--

YUBARI: --I could upload it. In Intelligence, we learned... "ways" of harmlessly neutralizing Starfleet security officers.

DOVAN: Sabotage?

LORHROK: Well... that's a pretty strong word.

DOVAN: Absolutely not. Even if Underwood weren't watching all three of us waiting for a mistake, I'm not going to allow anyone on this crew to risk their careers – or their lives, Yubari – by trying to... to steal the *Excelsior*. This is my responsibility; let me handle it.

LORHROK: (reluctant) Aye, sir.

DOVAN: Yubari?

YUBARI: Just don't let us down.

HARKLESS: I found her!

(He and the others frantically remove debris around T'Kala. Lohrok pulls out a tricorder while Doan reaches down to her neck with two fingers. The tricorder flatlines immediately.)

LORHROK: No lifesigns.

DOVAN: And no pulse. Brahms three, Good Guys zero. Excuse me. I have to make a call.

POST-PRODUCER: The following section was recorded, but should be cut in the final mixdown. It drags the scene out unnecessarily.

SCENE 301-06**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR READY ROOM**

DOVAN: No, I'm sorry, Commander. I like you, but I don't want to talk to you. I want to talk to Admiral Parker.

MASTERSON: *Commander, the Admiral is very busy right now--*

DOVAN: I'll just bet he is.

(Pause.)

MASTERSON: *What exactly are you implying, Commander?*

DOVAN: I need to talk to the Admiral. Commander.

MASTERSON: *I'll put you through.*

(The screen goes blank. It beeps at one-second intervals for a few seconds then Parker's face appears.)

PARKER: *Miz Masterson, I left orders that I not be – Commander Dovan.*

DOVAN: Admiral. Where are you right now?

PARKER: *An undisclosed location.*

DOVAN: With Brahms?

PARKER: *...yes.*

DOVAN: Has he told you yet why he did it?

PARKER: *This is going to sound far-fetched, Commander, but Brahms didn't do it.*

DOVAN: Ah. So the bomb materials we scraped off Ensign T'Kala's corpse were just a coincidence.

PARKER: *Dovan, I give you my word as a--*

DOVAN: Your word's not worth very much right now, Admiral. Let me undock.

PARKER: *I can't.*

DOVAN: Then you're not leaving me with much choice. Somebody has to investigate this.

PARKER: *And we are.*

DOVAN: No, not you, Admiral. I can't trust you anymore.

PARKER: *Then who?*

DOVAN: I was thinking the Fourth Estate.

PARKER: *The press? Dovan, you'd take the Sword of Damocles public?*

DOVAN: Can't you see? Captain Cortez was right. Brahms is trying to keep us in spacedock where he can get to us. And he's filling you up with lies so you'll help him. If my crew won't be protected by Starfleet, I'll take my chances with the public.

PARKER: *Dovan. Commander. I understand why you think what you do. But... it's wrong. You're not correct to trust Cortez. And you are getting very... very dangerously close to a line that... If you cross it, there's no coming back. I don't want to give your chair to Underwood. But I cannot allow this information to go to the press. I'll meet you tomorrow at Berth Nine, Airlock One. We're going to go down to see Brahms together. I'll see that you learn everything I know. Then you'll understand the position I'm in. Until then, I have no choice but to place the Excelsior under General Order Twenty-One.*

DOVAN: A communications blackout.

PARKER: *All incoming and outgoing communications from your vessel are prohibited under all*

circumstances. The Starbase will use an electromagnetic pulse to automatically jam any attempt to communicate with your vessel. This order will remain in effect until oh-eight-hundred tomorrow and cannot be otherwise revoked except by entering my personal command codes into the Excelsior mainframe. Is that clear?

DOVAN: Quite. But that makes this transmission illegal, doesn't it? Good-bye, Admiral.

PARKER: *Dovan--!*

(Dovan presses a button and ends the conversation. Then he stands up.)

DOVAN: What's that phrase Rol liked to say? Oh, right. Wheels within wheels within wheels. How apt. Shame I won't get to see Brahms tomorrow.

(Dovan exits to the bridge.)

SCENE 301-07**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CONFERENCE ROOM**

UNDERWOOD: So, yeah. I'm certainly attracted to the *Excelsior's* mission. Deep space, far side of the galaxy... good stuff. But, I've gotta say... what really excites me is the particular part of the frontier where we operate.

NEEVA: How do you mean?

UNDERWOOD: That mission to Valandria you went on. According to rumor... according to legend... that mission took you closer to the border of Scion space than any other expedition in Starfleet history.

THE MAJOR: Scions? I'm not familiar with that species.

NEEVA: The Scions of the Stars. An old space boomer legend. A race of powerful beings that supposedly lived before the dawn of recorded history. The usual story: ruled an empire, moved star systems, built time-travelling doughnuts, left behind advanced technology in glowing boxes, and, above all, mysteriously vanished... a long, long time ago.

UNDERWOOD: Yeah, them's them! I hope they're not completely legendary. I spent two years in a retrofitted garbage scow searching for evidence of them.

YUBARI: The scientific evidence suggests that some of the Scions evolved into a race of energy beings, and the rest left the galaxy.

UNDERWOOD: That they had almost magical power over matter and energy, which gave them the means to survive in the Galactic Void.

NEEVA: Sure, if you can call Cartier's study "evidence."

YUBARI: I don't think--

(The door opens. Dovan and Lohrok enter.)

DOVAN: I understand, Lor. And if we ever see Mister Rol alive again, I'll be sure to bring it up with him.

LORHROK: (sigh) Well, I guess all I can do is hope we get the chance.

(Lorhrok and Dovan sit down.)

DOVAN: Good afternoon. I'd like to keep this briefing... well, brief. You're all caught up on the events of the past month? Good. In case you missed some of the details, I'll recap the essentials for you now: Captain Cortez was the good guy. Brahms is the bad guy. They were after the Anbar and/or Sword of Damocles, pick your codename, and that's our job now, mainly mine. And don't trust Underwood.

UNDERWOOD: Hey!

DOVAN: Can't go crying to Admiral Parker now, Underwood — I just got us put under a communications blackout.

NEEVA: General Order Twenty-One?

DOVAN: That very one.

LORHROK: Serious business.

DOVAN: Right. Before she died, Captain Cortez gave me three clues to pursue: a codename, a set of coordinates, and a person. The first I've already mentioned. It's the Anbar. Until this morning, that name was a complete enigma to us. But I did some searching in the Starfleet database, and... after putting aside about two million references to a tumultuous province on Old Earth, I found this.

(Dovan stands and activates the briefing room viewer.)

DOVAN: Ladies and gentlemen, the S.S. *Anbar*.

LORHROK: Wow. I haven't seen a ship like that in a long time.

DOVAN: She's a class-three neutronic fuel carrier. They haven't built these in over a century.

UNDERWOOD: A class-three... isn't that the same kind of ship as...

DOVAN: As the *Kobayashi Maru*, yes.

YUBARI: Ominious.

DOVAN: Yes. Even more ominous: it turns out the *Anbar*'s captain, one Christopher Cox, is a distant relative of Captain Cortez.

LORHROK: Small galaxy.

DOVAN: Indeed! But here's the interesting part: almost eighty years ago, during a routine cargo run between Tellar and Deneb Four, the *Anbar* disappeared without a trace. No evidence or explanation has ever been found. Which brings us to the coordinates Captain Cortez gave me. I can only assume they point us to the current location of the *Anbar*... or whatever's left of it. How she learned this I can only imagine. We'll be heading directly there, on a course which will take us past Valandria into the Hesperus Sector.

LORHROK: That's pretty close to the Galactic Barrier.

DOVAN: We'll be about three days' travel from the Barrier, in fact. So this trip is going to take us to the extreme far edge of the galaxy. About three weeks from the Gateway. Once we get there, we're going to find out what the Sword of Damocles is. We're going to find out how the *Anbar* got way out there, what Starfleet Intelligence found onboard... and why Captain Cortez killed her captain. We're going to find out why Brahms keeps killing our crew, and we're going to find out what Dexter Remmick has to do with any of it. (pause) I haven't mentioned Dexter Remmick yet, have I?

(Pause.)

THE MAJOR: Sir! No, you haven't, sir.

DOVAN: The name Captain Cortez gave me, along with the *Anbar* and her coordinates... the name was Dexter Remmick. The first thing I tried to do was call him. Unfortunately, he's been dead for

nineteen years. (he presses a button) This is from the Starfleet Inspector General's archive. The middle-aged man in the front row with the sadly receding hairline? That's Lieutenant Commander Dexter Remmick. Everybody say hi to Dexter.

(Silence.)

LORHROK: Hi, Dexter.

DOVAN: Thank you, Alecz.

LORHROK: My pleasure, sir.

DOVAN: This picture was taken about two weeks before Mister Remmick died. According to official records, he was suddenly hospitalized for an undiagnosed heart condition. That's a little odd, of course, but not unheard of. Slightly stranger is the fact that his heart attack took place on the same day that a large number of officers at Starfleet Command — including three admirals and a captain — were *also* hospitalized for undiagnosed heart problems. Remmick and Captain Scott died; the others all recovered. That's suspicious. But it's all we know. I have *no* idea how this ties into the story of the *Anbar*, but I presume we'll find out when we get there. Questions?

THE MAJOR: Sir, what *is* General Brahm's take on all this, sir?

DOVAN: Other than killing innocent people over it? I wish I knew. Questions I can answer?

UNDERWOOD: You've been explicitly forbidden from going on this mission, Dovan. What are you doing telling them all this?

DOVAN: Questions I can answer without getting court-martialled?

LORHROK: Is our bet still on, sir?

DOVAN: Double or nothing?

LORHROK: You're on.

DOVAN: We launch in two hours. Dismissed.

(All stand and leave. Dovan stops Neeva at the door.)

DOVAN: One moment, Neeva.

NEEVA: Sir?

DOVAN: That flux chiller I asked for. Did you manage to get it on board before the communications blackout started?

NEEVA: Do you have any idea how hard it is to find a fifty-year-old spare part in one afternoon at a starbase at the edge of Federation space?

DOVAN: You weren't able to get one.

NEEVA: No, I got it. I just wanted you to know that you've been assigned the best damned chief of operations in the quadrant. Sir.

DOVAN: More than I deserve, Commander. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to deal with a problem in the warp nacelles if we're going to launch on time. Dismissed.

NEEVA: Sir.

(She exits.)

SCENE 301-08**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR ENGINEERING**

(Lorhrok and Westlake, who is running a diagnostic, are standing near the warp core.)

LORHROK: You're sure you didn't notice *anything* unusual?

WESTLAKE: I'm pretty sure, Alecz. I only worked one shift on the log recorder, and that was three days ago. The bomb was probably planted after that.

LORHROK: Still, I have to check. Was there anything unusual in the decryption process? Any computer slowdowns? Power losses? Strangely inaccessible circuits?

WESTLAKE: You mean other than the fact that the whole thing we were trying to get at was encrypted six ways from Sunday?

LORHROK: Well... yes.

WESTLAKE: Aside from that, no. There was nothing at all unusual.

LORHROK: And you were at your post for your entire shift?

WESTLAKE: Of course. I love this job. The only time I left was for my fifteen-minute break at midshift, and Chief Ermez was there to cover for me.

LORHROK: Alright. Thanks a lot for your time, Simon.

WESTLAKE: You're the boss. I'm a teenage civilian with a mental condition that's miraculously gone into remission. I count myself lucky to be allowed in here.

LORHROK: Everyone deserves the chance to be the person they want to be. I'll see you later, Simon.

WESTLAKE: Boss.

ADOW: Hey! Lieutenant Lorhrok!

LORHROK: Adow! What is it?

ADOW: Find anything yet?

LORHROK: Nope.

ADOW: I think I know why.

LORHROK: Really? Well, let's hear your theory.

ADOW: You've got all the engineers trying to think of some stranger who snuck in and attached the bomb when nobody was looking.

LORHROK: Right...

ADOW: They're never going to find anybody, then, if the person who planted the bomb was one of our engineers.

LORHROK: What? No, Adow, I don't think we're going there.

ADOW: It didn't have to be a willing bomber. It could have been someone under outside control — like Alex Rol was.

LORHROK: ...unfortunately, you have a point. Any suspects?

ADOW: I did some digging. I found out that one of our engineers spent a year in Starfleet Intelligence. I also found out that, according to his official file, he was assigned to the U.S.S. *Enterprise* for two years before he transferred to the *Excelsior*... but I called their chief engineer —

LORHROK: You called Geordi La Forge?

ADOW: Yeah, that sounds right. Whatever. And he said that he'd never heard of this guy of ours.

Which means...

LORHROK: Which means we don't know where or what this engineer was ten weeks ago.

ADOW: Which makes him a prime suspect.

LORHROK: Who is it?

ADOW: Oh, that's the best part, sir.

SCENE 301-09**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR SICKBAY**

(Sharp I quietly working on Ensign Ermez. Dovan enters.)

DOVAN: Doctor. I mean — Melissa. Are you busy?

SHARP: Alcar. How was the staff briefing?

DOVAN: A lot like the one we had before Valandria. Just... with a completely different senior staff this time.

SHARP: Sorry I missed it. Phillipe here was keeping me busy.

DOVAN: How is the Ensign?

SHARP: Well, he's alive. But... I've found something you should see.

DOVAN: There are a lot of things I need to see. Foremost among them is Ensign Ermez's name not showing up on a casualty list.

SHARP: Well, that's just it, sir. By all rights, you should be writing a letter of condolence to his family right now. His injuries were... profound. He was closer to the bomb than Ensign T'Kala, had more debris piled on him afterwards... She died instantly. And she was a Vulcan! Ermez is not only going to live. He's going to make a full recovery. Perhaps within a few days.

DOVAN: Then we're lucky, Doctor. No need to look a gift horse in the —

SHARP: Sir, there isn't a miracle on the books that could account for this. Not since Lazarus, at any rate. I'm at a complete loss to explain it. Or, at least, I was. And then one of the nurses found this.

(She turns over Ermez onto his stomach.)

SHARP: Look, there. On his neck.

DOVAN: Jehosephat. What is that?

SHARP: I can't tell you anything more than your eyes are showing you. It's blueish-brown, it's pointy, it's maybe three centimeters long...

DOVAN: ...and it's wriggling.

SHARP: It's obviously part of some larger mass underneath the skin, but we've been too busy keeping Ermez alive to scan it yet.

DOVAN: What is it? Like a... like a... gill?

SHARP: Well, it's not a tumor, it's not a burn, and it's not a cyst. It could be some kind of symbiote, in which case "gill" fits as well as anything. There's nothing in the medical database that even remotely resembles it.

DOVAN: It's... slimy, almost. Like when butter melts on your fingers and you can't get rid of that slick feeling until you wash your hands. But I don't see that this is necessarily a bad thing. Are you suggesting this is why Ermez survived the explosion?

SHARP: It's all I can think of, yes. It must be aiding his body's healing mechanisms in some way. But that doesn't mean it's a good thing. I have no idea what it is and I have no idea what else it's doing to him. If he contracted it on another planet, it could even be contagious. Either way, when Phillipe wakes up, we're going to be spending a lot of 'quality time' together until we figure it out.

DOVAN: I approve completely. But I don't want you to jeopardize his recovery by removing or tampering with this... "blue-gill."

SHARP: I agree.

DOVAN: Good. Well, then, Doctor, I'll be on my way. Now, you've done good work today. Magical neck-fish or not, Ensign Ermez wouldn't have survived this morning without a rare skill at the laser scalpel. You have my thanks — and Mr. Lorhrok's, too. He was holding vigil outside waiting for news

until I made him get back to work.

(Lohrok enters, followed by Adow and Yubari.)

LORHROK: I'm glad you did, sir. Otherwise we might never have figured out who planted the bomb.

ADOW: Thanks to me, I might add.

YUBARI: Shut up, Adow.

DOVAN: You have a suspect?

LORHROK: Actually, once we knew where to look, we found proof.

ADOW: Right quick.

YUBARI: Sir, I checked the security logs backwards and forwards and couldn't find any evidence of any outside force tampering with the log recorder – no intruders, no unidentified personnel, no transporter activity.

DOVAN: The logs were damaged.

YUBARI: That was my assumption, too. But then Adow and Lohrok came to me with their theory--

ADOW: My theory.

LORHROK: Shut up, Adow.

YUBARI: --and, once I knew to watch the engineers themselves...

DOVAN: What?

LORHROK: An engineer, sir. One of ours.

DOVAN: Are you saying we have a spy at large on board the *Excelsior*?

YUBARI: Was at large, yes.

DOVAN: What do you mean?

YUBARI: Security cameras captured a timecoded image and DNA scan of the engineer who planted the bomb. There's no doubt.

DOVAN: Give me a name, Lieutenant!

YUBARI: It was Ensign Phillippe Ermez.

DOVAN: Doctor, the neck-fish--

SHARP: What? You want me to believe that Phillipe planted the bomb that almost killed him?

DOVAN: Doctor, the fish-stick--

LORHROK: A suicide bombing wouldn't be out of the question if Ermez were under some kind of outside control.

DOVAN: Melissa! The blue-gill!

SHARP: Oh, my God.

DOVAN: A little present from Starfleet Intelligence, no doubt. Get Ermez in quarantine, and find out what that thing is!

SHARP: Yes, sir!

DOVAN: The rest of you – to your posts.

YUBARI: Sir?

DOVAN: We're getting out of here now.

LORHROK: (simultaneous) Yes, sir!

YUBARI: (simultaneous) Sir!

ADOW: (simultaneous) A'ight!

(Dovan exits. Yubari follows.)

LORHROK: Adow, earlier today, when you wanted to take Ermez off warp duty... you were right about him. I'm sorry – I should have listened.

ADOW: You're an officer. Officers only hear what they expect to--

(Lorhrok presses the door control.)

LORHROK: Ow! Sorry – my hands are still a little tender from the burns. You were saying?

ADOW: Never mind. Apology accepted, sir.

SCENE 301-10**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(The bridge is busy.)

DOVAN: Do we have launch clearance yet?

NEEVA: No: we're still under the communications blackout.

LORHROK: Sir, I don't think Parker's going to give you clearance. Whatever you said to him--

DOVAN: Patience, Lorhrok. We still have... four minutes before I lose that bet. (pause) Hail the starbase.

(Neeva attempts to open hailing frequencies, but it fails.)

NEEVA: Can't, sir. All outbound communications are still being jammed.

DOVAN: Alright, then.

(Pause.)

(Dovan presses the intercom.)

DOVAN: Bridge to Engineering. Adow, begin impulse engine main startup sequence. Initialize warp chamber.

YUBARI: Sir, Neeva's right: we don't have authorization to undock. And we can't get through those spacedoors unless Parker opens them.

DOVAN: I know. But there's no regulation that says we can't power up our own engines. The admiral still has a few minutes to see the light. Proceed with powerup, Adow.

ADOW: *On it, captain. Initializing plasma feed...*

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Try raising the Starbase again.

(Neeva dutifully tries again. Same result.)

NEEVA: Still noth-- (An alarm sounds on her board.) Captain, the plasma cycle – number one safety interlock just failed. (More alarms go off) Correction: number two... and three!

DOVAN: Get them back online.

(As a fourth alarm erupts on Neeva's board, shipwide red alert automatically engages.)

NEEVA: I can't, sir! Number *four* now showing red!

DOVAN: Lohrok--

(Lohrok is pressing buttons furiously.)

LORHROK: I'm trying. I can't see any cause! They're just... failing!

(Two more alarms!)

NEEVA: Five and six are down!

(The red alert turns to a core breach alert)

DOVAN: Lohrok, how many safeties are there?

LORHROK: Seven.

NEEVA: Number seven just failed.

LORHROK: Oh, Maker. It's a plasma cascade. A full-blown plasma cascade.

YUBARI: What? What does that mean?

LORHROK: It means that in about five and a half minutes, we're going to lose antimatter containment, and this ship is going to explode. And it's going to take everything within ten thousand kilometers with it.

DOVAN: Then get down there and fix it!

LORHROK: Sir... I would. But there's nothing I can do.

(Stunned silence.)

DOVAN: We're inside a starbase. Fifty thousand people work here! We can't just explode them all!

LORHROK: You're right. (he opens the intercom.) Adow, this is Lorchrok! Give me full power to aft thrusters. Helm! All ahead full!

NEEVA: Captain?

DOVAN: Lorchrok, spacedoors are still closed. Unless you intend to crash into them...

(Lorchrok's fingers still flying across the keys...)

LORHROK: Even with the communications blackout, stardock safety sensors will detect the danger and open for us. It's an automatic system.

DOVAN: If you say so. Commander Neeva, follow his orders. Aft thrusters full... take us out.

LOCATION: SPACEDOCK HANGAR

(The *Excelsior* undocks, clearing moorings as workbees and such struggle to get out of the way.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

NEEVA: All moorings cleared, sir. Thrusters at full.

LORHROK: This cannot be happening. Seven independent safety interlocks don't just fail.

DOVAN: They do if they're sabotaged.

NEEVA: But who'd do that? Who'd even be able to?

YUBARI: Brahms. It has to be.

DOVAN: Focus, people. Lorhrok, can we save part of the ship? Separate the saucer section, get clear of the warp core?

LORHROK: No point. We can't do a saucer sep fast enough; the saucer would be destroyed by the shockwave anyway.

DOVAN: Then... If we do have to abandon ship — will there be enough time for the escape pods to... escape?

LORHROK: Easily. Assuming they're all in good working order, our escape pods should only need about... ten seconds to get clear of the explosion.

DOVAN: I'll give them twenty.

YUBARI: Why hasn't Admiral Parker lifted the blackout yet? This is clearly an emergency.

DOVAN: Admiral Parker's in an undisclosed location and can't easily be reached.

LORHROK: And there's nobody else on the starbase who can countermand it?

DOVAN: Not being able to countermand it is the whole point of General Order Twenty-One. (He hits the shipwide intercom.) All hands report to escape pods. Prepare to abandon ship on my order. Repeat, all hands prepare to abandon ship. (ends shipwide) Neeva, status of the cascade.

NEEVA: Still more than three minutes to detonation.

DOVAN: Time to spacedoors?

NEEVA: Clearing them now.

(Dovan again opens the shipwide intercom.)

DOVAN: All hands, standby. (Then he closes it again. Pause) Mister Lorhrok, I'm not willing to give up on the *Excelsior* until we've tried everything. Is there nothing we can do?

LORHROK: No, sir! Nothing! We need to abandon ship... now!

DOVAN: Not good enough! There's still time! Quickly — Adow, you're in on this, too! — (he snaps his fingers as he talks) improvised equipment, (snap) crackpot theories, (snap) articles you read in *Nacelles Monthly*, uh... Come on, come on!

ADOW: *We're trying!*

LORHROK: Look, uh... if this happened on an older ship — say, the original *Excelsior*, all we'd have to do is connect the plasma grid to a flux chiller.

ADOW: We don't have a flux chiller!

LORHROK: I know that. But maybe we could find one on Union--

ADOW: In three minutes?!

LORHROK: At least I'm--

NEEVA: Wait. Lieutenant. Did you say "flux chiller"?

LORHROK: A flux chiller'd save the day, yes. But they're fifty years old! We don't even have the materials to improvise one! And you can't just (snaps) snap one into existence with duct tape and fond hopes!

NEEVA: Sir-- (falters)

LOCATION: NEEVA'S MEMORIES

(Flash!)

DOVAN: (flashback) I need you to requisition a flux chiller for the warp nacelles by dinner time.

(Flash!)

DOVAN: (flashback) That flux chiller I asked for. Did you manage to get it on board?

(Flash!)

DOVAN: (flashback) Yours not to reason why, Commander. Yours just to do and die.

(Flash!)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

LORHROK: Commander? What is it?

NEEVA: (with a deep breath) Sir, we have a flux chiller onboard. I loaded it myself, this afternoon.

LORHROK: (quietly) What? (less quietly) Where?!

NEEVA: It's in the ion pod! Deck Thirteen!

(Lorhrok slams down on the intercom.)

LORHROK: Adow, get up to the ion pod! You're going to find a flux chiller there! Plug it in!

ADOW: *A flux chiller? Bad time for jokes, Lieutenant!*

LORHROK: No joke! Go!

(He ends the communication.)

LORHROK: Commander... I hate to sound ungrateful, but why do we just happen to have a flux chiller on board?

NEEVA: I... I don't... I think the only person who can answer that question is Captain Dov--

ADOW: *Adow here! I'm in the ion pod! You weren't joking, Lorhrok. Why do we even have this thing?*

LORHROK: Just plug it in, Adow!

ADOW: *Just give me two se... There! Got it! Flux chiller active!*

LORHROK: Oh, thank the Maker. Diverting the plasma feed...

NEEVA: All grilles are open. Excess plasma is venting into space.

(The klaxons stop. The alarms on her board lower in pitch and end. Status boards go green.)

(Stunned silence.)

NEEVA: Cascade is over, Captain.

LORHROK: That... that shouldn't have happened. And once it did happen we shouldn't have survived.

DOVAN: No need to look a gift horse in the mouth, Alecz.

(He reopens the shipwide intercom.)

DOVAN: All hands, this is the captain. Evacuation's off, folks. Return to your posts and stand down red alert. (He ends shipwide) Miz Neeva, time.

NEEVA: Nineteen fifty-eight, sir.

DOVAN: Perfect. Two minutes to spare.

LORHROK: Sir?

DOVAN: Operations, am I correct in assuming that we have received no official orders regarding our

next assignment?

NEEVA: We're under a communications blackout, sir.

DOVAN: That wasn't my question.

NEEVA: No, sir. Our last official set of orders authorized us to dock at Starbase 911 until, quote, "such time as her commanding officer was satisfied that she was again in good repair and ready for active duty."

DOVAN: I am so satisfied.

NEEVA: Then... officially, sir... the *Excelsior* is at your discretion. But--

LORHROK: Captain, Admiral Parker ordered us to stay here until--

DOVAN: Actually, X.O., Admiral Parker didn't give us any orders. Formally, the only thing he did was refuse to give us launch clearance. Well, we're not in spacedock anymore, so launch clearance is one thing I don't need. Commander Neeva, take us through the Gateway. Then set course one-one-four mark three-eight-eight mark eight. Best speed.

LORHROK: The *Anbar*, sir?

DOVAN: The *Anbar*.

(Pause.)

LORHROK: Sir, you... You didn't need to do that alone. Yubari and I--

DOVAN: Yeah. Yeah, I did.

NEEVA: Course set, captain.

DOVAN: Captain... I could get used to that. (pause) Hit it.

(Neeva presses the engage control.)

LOCATION: SPACE

(The ship powers up and swoops at impulse through the Gateway. Upon reaching the other side, the *Excelsior* immediately goes to warp.)

SCENE 301-11**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* rockets past us as warp speed.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR READY ROOM

(The doorbell chimes.)

DOVAN: Venite! Adoretis! (tr: Come! You may adore!)

(Underwood enters.)

DOVAN: Ah. Underwood.

UNDERWOOD: I suppose I should just arrest you for sabotage right now.

DOVAN: Probably should. Of course, it wouldn't get you anywhere. You've got no proof, and even if you did it wouldn't get you the support of anyone on the crew except Neeva. And you can't contact the Admiral until tomorrow morning. By then we'll be long out of communications range.

UNDERWOOD: I only have one question: did you *deliberately* provoke the communications blackout, or was that just a stroke of incredible good luck?

DOVAN: It wouldn't have *worked* without the communications blackout, would it?

UNDERWOOD: Theft of a starship. That's twenty years, you know.

DOVAN: My crew has a chance now of being safe from Brahms. That's all that matters.

UNDERWOOD: Hard to believe, coming from you. You almost got them all killed all on your own a few hours ago.

DOVAN: Oh, come on, Underwood. There was never any real danger. We had the equipment we needed. It was only a matter of waiting for the senior staff to realize it.

UNDERWOOD: And if something had gone wrong?

DOVAN: It didn't go wrong. There was nothing to go wrong. Why? Because rock beats scissors, paper beats rock, and flux chiller beats plasma cascade.

UNDERWOOD: But you can't know that! No captain has that kind of power!

DOVAN: The captain's job is to know that. Here. Read this.

(He picks up a padd off his desk and hands it to Underwood. Underwood clicks through it as Dovan talks.)

DOVAN: At oh-eight-hundred hours this morning, I ordered five work crews to drop everything and report directly to me.

UNDERWOOD: Over Commander Neeva's objections, according to this. (scrolling down) Oh! And you got them pulled off hellfire duty! Left fifty of the damn things onboard! Good job!

DOVAN: What did I assign them to?

UNDERWOOD: ...a level-one diagnostic of the escape pods.

DOVAN: Lorhrok said we'd need "ten seconds" — if all the escape pods were in working order. I made sure they were.

(Underwood tosses the pad back on the desk.)

UNDERWOOD: Is this supposed to prove something? You can't talk your way out of the fact that you put your crew at risk.

DOVAN: Quite the opposite, Underwood. To do nothing -- that would have put the crew at risk. If I'd acted earlier, maybe T'Kala would be alive right now. I put my ship at risk. I put your ambitions at risk. I put my career at - No, never mind: I threw my career in the incinerator. But, in the end, I put only one person in any danger of life, limb, or rank. Me. And if I save just one person from Brahm before I get drummed out, then it was worth it. Dismissed, Commander.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: (threateningly) Dovan--

DOVAN: Don't worry, Underwood. I'll keep your seat warm.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Then I'll see you later, Dovan.

(Underwood exits.)

DOVAN: (exhales) Of course, a captain might, hypothetically, have additional motives for sabotage.

(He presses the intercom.)

DOVAN: Dovan to Lorhrok.

LORHROK: *Lorhrok here, sir.*

DOVAN: Remember our bet?

LORHROK: *Oh, dear.*

DOVAN: Lieutenant, I expect two bottles of brandy deposited in front of my quarters by midnight.

LORHROK: (sigh) *Yes, sir.*

DOVAN: Will you join me for a drink when I crack them open?

LORHROK: *Alright. I'll be there.*

DOVAN: It's a date! Dovan out. (He leans back in his chair.) Oh, yeah. Definitely worth it.

SCENE 301-12**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR MEDICAL QUARANTINE LAB**

SHARP: Medical Log, Stardate Sixty-Thousand-And-One. Isolation protocols are in effect. I'm beginning my analysis of Ensign Phillipe Ermez, and what appears to be... well, I'll admit it. I have no idea what it is. But it's in his neck — probably has part of his spine and his brain stem, too. We'll just start off with a straightforward brain scan, then.

(She walks over to some kind of big heavy machinery and it whirs and hums and a sort of red beam begins to pass slowly over Ermez's body.)

SHARP: We're not going to do any invasive work today. In fact, we'll probably spend several sessions doing nothing but diagnostic tests. I don't want to go fiddling around inside Phillipe's head with a laser scalpel without--

ERMEZ: (suddenly inhales sharply and raggedly and starts breathing irregularly.)

SHARP: Phillipe? Phillipe, are you alright? Are you waking up? In case the camera isn't catching this, subject has just entered irregular respiration. But there's no sign of any distress... and no sign he's regaining consciousness. Damn. I'm beginning-- Oh my God.

(Ermez begins gagging.)

SHARP: Something is climbing out of Phillipe's mouth! It's... some kind of purplish insect, four or five centimeters long! I believe this creature is the source of the "blue-gill!" Creature has fully exited the mouth — is now resting on the chin as if getting ready to — (shouting, panicked) Computer, quick! Quarantine field, level--

(The bluegill pounces, landing right on her chin!)

SHARP: It's on me! It's on me! Get it off get it off get it — (she gags and screams as the creature forces its way down her throat. Then she takes a deep breath and speaks in a very pleased, warm... even *sensual* tone) Ah. New body. Mm. Love that feeling. (she opens and shuts her jaw experimentally) And new teeth! Always weird. Okay, then. Where was I? Oh, right. Computer, stop

recording medical log and delete this entire entry.

(The computer complies, and its deletion beep is the abrupt end to our episode.)