

Starship: Excelsior
"Meeting Minutes"
(Season 4, Episode G)
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 4G-01**LOCATION: STARBASE 911 - TURBOLIFT**

UNDERWOOD: Personal log, Stardate Six-oh-five-four-eight-point-six, Commander Joshua Underwood recording. Admiral Athos Parker, Starbase Nine-One-One, has invited me to present at a policy conference with him. While I'm flattered by the opportunity, I'm not looking forward to spending a day in a shuttle with the Admiral, given my personal history with him.

(Turbolift stops, Underwood steps out)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – COMBAT INFORMATION CENTER

MASTERSON: Commander Underwood, welcome to Starbase Nine-One-One, the hub of Union System.

UNDERWOOD: Thank you, Commander...

MASTERSON: Alix Masterson. Admiral Parker is in the O.O.D.'s Office.

(She starts walking that way. Underwood follows.)

UNDERWOOD: Lead the way, Commander.

(They reach the door to the Officer of the Deck office. The door rolls open. Masterson steps in, Underwood just behind her.)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – OFFICER OF THE DECK'S OFFICE

MASTERSON: Commander Underwood, just arriving, sir.

PARKER: Thank you, Commander. Dismissed.

MASTERSON: Sir.

(She turns and exits, the door closing behind her.)

PARKER: Mister Underwood, I am pleased to see you.

UNDERWOOD: Admiral Parker, I'm... surprised?

PARKER: Understandably. I'll explain. But first, tell me, how is Commander Masterson?

UNDERWOOD: You'd know better than I: she's your X.O. We only spoke for a moment.

PARKER: And you didn't notice anything... unusual... in that moment?

UNDERWOOD: Nothing as unusual as this conversation. Sir.

PARKER: It's my birthday tomorrow, and I'm afraid she's planning a surprise party.

UNDERWOOD: Ah, well, then, I understand. Can't be seen having fun, can you?

PARKER: Commander, I detect a note of insubordination.

UNDERWOOD: This year, you've had me secretly survey ancient Iconian ruins all over the quadrant – and you've ordered me to lie to my captain more than once to keep it secret.

PARKER: Commander, six years ago, we had an argument. You punched me in the face. It was a mean right uppercut.

UNDERWOOD: That has nothing to do with it. And it was a left hook.

PARKER: Was it? I suppose it was.

UNDERWOOD: You had me thrown out of Starfleet. Took me years to claw my way back in.

PARKER: Tell me, do you remember what I whispered to you that day, as I let you out of the headlock?

UNDERWOOD: Admiral – [I don't see how it helps either of us to dig up old memories like this.]

PARKER: Answer the question. That's an order.

UNDERWOOD: You said... You said, "I knew you couldn't do it."

(Pause.)

PARKER: Correct. Good. Good. Mister Underwood... you're still you.

UNDERWOOD: Excuse me?

PARKER: Not here, Commander. I've secured the room, but I'm not sure how long it will hold. Here, take this. Switch it on.

(Parker hands Underwood a piece of equipment, about the size of a fist. Underwood switches it on.)

UNDERWOOD: What is it?

PARKER: A biosign projector. Anyone who scans this will detect a human male, age approximately forty, BMI twenty-eight, genetic predisposition to hyperopia.

UNDERWOOD: Me.

PARKER: Precisely. I have one, too. Now take this.

(Parker hands Underwood another device, nearly identical, and Underwood switches it on as above.)

UNDERWOOD: This being...?

PARKER: A biosign scrambler. Key it to your commbadge, like this.

(Parker taps his commbadge three times in a row, and the device beep-boops in acknowledgement.)

PARKER: Now if anyone scans me, they'll read no life signs at all. They'll only see the false readings from the projector. Do it.

(Underwood does the same thing with the commbadge.)

UNDERWOOD: Admiral, with all due respect, just what the devil [are you doing?]

PARKER: Are we doing? In good time. Now, I need to know, right now, this second: will you obey my orders, Commander?

UNDERWOOD: Lawful orders?

PARKER: Scrupulously.

UNDERWOOD: Then I will obey them, Admiral.

PARKER: Thank you, Commander. But you can call me 'sir.' Now, clip those under your waistband and follow me; our shuttle is ready to leave for the conference.

(He walks straight out the door.)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – COMBAT INFORMATION CENTER

(Masterson and Gwyn are softly talking [inaudibly])

(Underwood follows Parker, but only after waiting a couple seconds, and then he has to hurry to catch up. As Parker reaches Masterson near the bottom of the stairs, he stops.)

PARKER: Commander Masterson, the station is yours.

MASTERSON: Aye, sir.

PARKER: Doctor Gwyn, what brings you up to the C.I.C.?

DAFFYD GWYN: Just checking in with Alix here about Lieutenant Commander Koll's condition.

PARKER: Have you found out the reason for his coma yet?

GWYN: I'm afraid not, sir. But we'll keep at it!

PARKER: See that you do. Mister Underwood?

(They continue to the lift.)

LOCATION: TURBOLIFT

PARKER: Command Dock, Berth One.

(The lift beeps in compliance. and sends them on their way.)

(Pause.)

PARKER: Lieutenant Commander Aurin Koll is my best friend in the world.

UNDERWOOD: He's in a coma?

PARKER: For over a week now.

UNDERWOOD: What happened?

PARKER: He didn't report for duty one morning. Doctor Gwyn says he was found in bed, unconscious.

UNDERWOOD: You say it like you don't believe Doctor Gwyn's report, sir.

PARKER: They're telling me it's something wrong with his symbiote. Aurin's a joined Trill. Gwyn says it looks like rejection.

UNDERWOOD: The early days of a joining can be very difficult on the body. I'm sure, once his body gets used to the symbiote...

PARKER: Aurin was joined thirteen years ago with no complications. In the entire history of Trill medicine, there's no record of symbiote rejection this late in a stable joining. Not naturally, anyway.

UNDERWOOD: Are you suggesting that someone has attacked a member of your command staff? What does Doctor Gwyn think of that?

PARKER: Hm... We're here.

(The turbolift arrives and opens. They exit.)

LOCATION: STARBASE 911 – SMALL SHUTTLEBAY

PARKER: Smile for the cameras, Commander.

UNDERWOOD: Mm?

PARKER: There, there, and there. Don't look at them, Commander. We are being watched.

(They open the shuttlecraft door and enter. Door closes behind them.)

LOCATION: SHUTTLECRAFT *WHITNEY*

UNDERWOOD: Admiral, this all seems awfully irregular.

PARKER: Very observant, Commander. Now, have you ever used a Rutian [ROOT-ee-en] dimensional shifter?

UNDERWOOD: I've never even heard of it.

(Parker takes the pilot controls and starts pressing buttons.)

PARKER: It's a kind of transporter. (he opens the comm) C.I.C., Shuttlecraft *Whitney*, request launch clearance and routing, over.

MASTERSON: *Shuttlecraft Whitney, Starbase Nine-One-One actual, standby for clearance, over.*

PARKER: Acknowledged, over. (he closes the comm channel) It's a kind of transporter. It allows you to beam through shields, undetected, at long range, but at a cost – use it five times in your life and you're a vegetable, six and you're dead.

MASTERSON: *Shuttlecraft Whitney, clearance granted, please use departure vector vulcan-niner-echo, over.*

(The shuttlebay door begins to open, and standard decompression alarms go off as the air evacuates.)

PARKER: (opens comm channel) Vulcan-niner-echo, confirmed, over. (closes comm channel)

MASTERSON: *Safe journey, Admiral. Over and out.*

(Parker powers the engines. The shuttle lifts off.)

PARKER: Sloppy. That's their weakness: they think nobody's paying attention.

UNDERWOOD: Sir?

(The shuttle exits the starbase through a forcefield. They are now in open space.)

PARKER: Commander Masterson's the best adjutant I've ever had. I understand she's a warm and gregarious person in private, but with me she maintains our distance precisely. She'd never wish me a "safe journey" on an open channel. And she certainly wouldn't call me "Admiral."

UNDERWOOD: But isn't that... what she just did?

PARKER: Quickly now, Commander. Here, take this.

UNDERWOOD: What is it?

PARKER: Your inverter. It'll activate the dimensional shifter. Computer, engage shuttlecraft autopilot, program Roark-Gamma-Six.

(The computer beeps.)

COMPUTER: *Autopilot engaged.*

UNDERWOOD: We're not actually going to the conference, are we?

PARKER: Our shuttlecraft will arrive and enter orbit, Starfleet records will show we attended, and half a dozen witnesses will swear we were there.

UNDERWOOD: I was really rather looking forward to giving my paper. Spent days on it.

PARKER: Commander, I don't give a tinker's damn about your paper. Lives are on the line, not least your own. Now, place your biosign projector on the co-pilot seat. As far as anyone following this shuttle is concerned, we're on our way to the conference.

UNDERWOOD: Aye, sir.

PARKER: Beginning dimensional shift...

(They dimensionally shift away.)

SCENE 4G-02a**LOCATION: SS TAWNY ANNE**

(Parker and Underwood dimensionally shift onto the deck of this small, grimy, worn-out courier ship.)

UNDERWOOD: Admiral, where [did you send us?]

(Parker cries out in terrible pain, collapsing to his knees.)

UNDERWOOD: Admiral! Are you alright?

PARKER: I... I'll be fine.

COX: Maybe. (she draws and charges a phaser) Maybe not. What the hell are you two doing on my ship?

UNDERWOOD: Skipper Samantha Cox! I thought you were in a resettlement colony, in New Zealand.

COX: That's not your most pressing concern right now, Mister Underwood. Why shouldn't I stun you right now and turn you over for trespassing?

PARKER: Skipper! (grunt) Skipper... You're here to meet a Ferengi merchant named Turgil. He offered you a bargain price on leola root, in bulk.

COX: That's right. You can't get leola in the Federation. My crew misses it. That doesn't answer my question.

PARKER: Skipper, Turgil's not here. He hasn't been in this sector in twenty years. I sent you that message. I brought your ship here, at this exact time, to these exact coordinates, because you and Mister Underwood are the only ones I can trust.

UNDERWOOD: Admiral, are you...?

PARKER: I'm fine. That was my just third time using the shifter. They say three and four hurt even more than five and six. I didn't realize... just how much...

COX: I don't know about you, Underwood, but I'd like to know what makes us so important.

UNDERWOOD: Lower your phaser first, Skipper.

COX: I don't think so.

UNDERWOOD: Skipper, I'm as in the dark as you are about what's going on, but I've been watching Admiral Parker. He's scared, he's desperate, he needs us for some reason, and that's the truth.

(Skipper Cox deactivates and holsters her gun)

UNDERWOOD: Thank you. Admiral, there are fifty thousand people on your starbase. I'm the man you drummed out of Starfleet, now a lowly first officer on deep space assignment. Skipper Cox spent most of her life lost in space outside the galaxy. She only got back on Stardate Five-nine-seven... zero-six?

COX: Zero-four.

UNDERWOOD: Hardly a year ago. She and her crew are only just starting to settle into their new life. How can we possibly be the “only” people you trust?

PARKER: I knew you’d understand what was happening. And I knew you weren’t already infested.

UNDERWOOD: Infested?

COX: Infested... Oh, God. The buggers... They’re here.

PARKER: Yes. Three weeks ago, the neural parasites we call “the bluegills” began to infiltrate Starbase Nine-One-One. They’ve taken control of at least some of my command staff. I don’t know how, I don’t know who, I don’t know how many, but I know that they want me dead... or worse.

UNDERWOOD: But we defeated the bluegills! On the *Excelsior*, at Gevinon Prime!

PARKER: No. You erased one planet. You upset their delicate balance of power. You plunged them back into conflict with the Borg, which held off the Sword of Damocles for a little while longer. But the bluegills – and the Sword – remain an existential threat to the Federation. You were whining earlier because I forced you to survey Iconian ruins, secretly. Do you know why I did that, Commander?

UNDERWOOD: No.

PARKER: Because the bluegills have been doing the same thing, all this year. We noticed just after Gevinon: they sweep into a system, scour any Iconian ruins they find, and then disappear. It’s unprecedented, and the ruins are responding defensively, in ways we’ve never seen before – an anti-bluegill dancing plague on Mantua, an automatic sentry the size of a dwarf planet

near Zathana. All because the bluegills are looking for something, desperately, in the ruins of an ancient civilization. Captain Dovan figured it out months ago; I'm surprised you haven't.

UNDERWOOD: Is that so.

COX: And now they're here, in Federation space, risking discovery and the collapse of the Sword of Damocles. Why?

PARKER: That's what I intend to find out. The bluegills on the Starbase were planning to make their move as soon as I was either infested or out of the way. I've dodged four attempts on my life in the past three days. As far as they know, I just left the system on a shuttle. Whatever they're planning, they'll do it now.

UNDERWOOD: Ample opportunities for them. A thriving colony on Union Three, with links to the rest of the Raeyan Sector. Extensive Iconian ruins on Union Three's surface. And, of course, the Iconian Gateway to the other side of the galaxy – a key strategic position, especially when it comes to the bluegills.

PARKER: Don't forget the Poseidon Shipyards. The Manner Research Station. Lay in a course for Union Three, Captain Cox. We can monitor the situation from there without drawing suspicion.

COX: No, I don't think so.

PARKER: Captain Cox. Skipper, if you must. Surely you recognize how critical this is, why I had to lure you here.

COX: If anything you're saying is true. Underwood, have you tested the admiral for infestation?

UNDERWOOD: I checked the back of his neck, yes. If he were infested, we'd be able to see a small breathing gill there.

COX: Maybe.

UNDERWOOD: Maybe?

COX: My crew tangled with the buggers a few times out in the Big Empty. We learned quick that the buggers know how to hide the gills; there's a few ways of doing it. Their true weakness is memory. Even after they crawl into your skull and take over, they can't read your memories. Have you asked the admiral anything only he would know?

PARKER: Skipper, this is absurd. If we just [consider the path that brought us here...]

(Cox's phaser comes back out.)

COX: This is set to kill, Admiral. I won't hesitate to use it if you take one step toward me or him. Underwood?

UNDERWOOD: He asked me some questions. But not the other way 'round.

COX: Then I'll do it. Admiral, during our debriefing after the *Anbar* survivors came home, how long did you keep us before you let us take a break? Was it four hours, or eight?

PARKER: Twenty-two. Then we let you sleep for three and came back for another twenty-two. But even a bluegill would know that's standard procedure in Special Projects Division.

COX: Standard procedure? Schmitt had a panic attack, tore up half the room. Instead of letting me help him calm down, you let your spooks stun him down.

PARKER: He lived.

COX: See, any bluegill infiltrator in the galaxy right there would have started with, "I'm sorry." (Cox uncharges/lowers/holsters her weapon again.) But that's their other weakness: personality. It's hard to be as flint-hearted as you are, Parker. Even to fake it.

PARKER: We all have our duties. There are lines I won't cross. Making your friends uncomfortable while I investigate an imminent threat to our very free will? Isn't one of them.

COX: Uncomfort—! Fine. That's Admiral Parker alright, Underwood. We might be better off with a bluegill.

PARKER: Captain Cox—

COX: Don't get your panties in a twist, Admiral. I'll lay in a course.

(She heads back to the fore of the compartment.)

UNDERWOOD: I can't help noticing, sir, that the only two people you trust don't like you very much.

PARKER: I suppose I could have called in General Hanas. But her solution would probably involve a great deal of collateral damage.

UNDERWOOD: Might that be an acceptable loss, given the stakes? If the bluegills start to win their war, not one of us will survive the winds that will blow then.

PARKER: I agree that there is an acceptable-loss threshold, Mister Underwood, but I think you fail to appreciate the sheer scale of General Hanas's typical solutions.

UNDERWOOD: Not quite the flint-heart she thinks you are, then, eh, sir?

PARKER: Commander... I honestly don't know anymore.

COX: *Hey! Get up here!*

(Underwood and Parker start to hurry over.)

UNDERWOOD: What happened?

COX: Another shuttlecraft just launched from Nine-one-one. Command deck.

PARKER: That's the *Maimonides*. Commander Masterson's yacht.

COX: They've set course for the planet. Near Farway City.

PARKER: Hold course for Equinox; show no signs of interest. Keep an eye on them, passive scans only. We'll let them get where they're going, then we can drop into the atmosphere and follow undetected.

COX: I'm not an idiot, Admiral.

PARKER: I have some work to do before we make orbit. Excuse me.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The shuttle flies by.)

SCENE 4G-98: THEME CREDITS

PARKER: *They're coming for us. A secret war rages across our galaxy, between two great enemies who could snuff us out like a candle. What they don't know about... is me. From the Operations Center of Starbase Nine-One-One, I command fleets in two quadrants. I don't know how to stop Armageddon, but maybe I can keep it hanging by a horsehair. I'm not the first. I won't be the last. But, for today, at least... I'm your only hope. (pause) Star Trek: Excelsior. (Pause.) Starring Nathan Lysne as Admiral Athos Roark-Parker*

MASTERSON: *With Janet Green as Commander Alix Masterson*

UNDERWOOD: *Gareth Bowley as Commander Joshua Underwood*

COX: *And Eleiece Krawiec as Skipper Sam Cox*

SCENE 4G-2b**LOCATION: SHUTTLE**

UNDERWOOD: We're in cloud cover over Equinox, sir.

COX: The *Maimonides* is going to land.

PARKER: Where?

COX: A few kilometers northwest of Farway.

PARKER: The Iconian ruins. Lay in a course, but keep us in the cloud bank.

(Cox is already complying.)

COX: In this weather? Won't be a problem. At least we had one bit of good luck.

PARKER: Luck? No, I overrode the planet's weather control system. Sent a thousand-kilometer cold front rolling in. What did you think I was doing back there?

UNDERWOOD: How many life-forms aboard that shuttle?

COX: Passive scans only. Means no life-form readouts.

PARKER: The *Maimonides* seats six, but they could have as few as one person and as many as twelve packed in there.

UNDERWOOD: Ah, they're heading for the cave entrances.

COX: Caves?

UNDERWOOD: The surface ruins on Union have been picked clean over the centuries – partly looters, mostly the asteroid.

COX: The what?

PARKER: About eighty years ago, a large mass struck Union III. Devastating. It left a crater the size of a small continent and crushed the biosphere.

UNDERWOOD: When the Federation decided to colonize, it took ten years of terraforming just to get this planet back to the shape it had been in before the asteroid.

PARKER: Assuming it was an asteroid.

UNDERWOOD: It had to be an asteroid. Have you seen the crater?

PARKER: I live here, Commander. There's a beautiful crater, alright, but no asteroid debris has ever been found. And the Union star system has no asteroid belt.

UNDERWOOD: Mystery for the geologists, I think.

PARKER: Indeed. Now would you kindly focus on the task at hand, Commander?

COX: We're approaching their landing site. Looks like they're already inside the caves.

PARKER: Can you beam us down?

COX: Only a little ways inside. Whatever those caves are made of, it doesn't like transporter beams.

UNDERWOOD: Or sensor beams, or communication beams, or any other kind of beam, from what I'm seeing.

PARKER: The perfect place for us to set an ambush.

UNDERWOOD: Or for them to do the same.

PARKER: I suppose we'll have to take that chance. Set phasers to kill.

COX: You'd think, in twenty years, Starfleet would be able to develop a stun that can take down a bugger host.

PARKER: An infested person has incredibly enhanced strength and stamina. We may not have the luxury of waiting four seconds for a maximum stun to take each one down.

(All three draw and charge hand phasers.)

COX: Callous as ever.

PARKER: Captain Cox... energize.

SCENE 4G-03**LOCATION: ICONIAN RUINS - CAVES - UNION III**

(It's pouring rain in a howling thunderstorm outside.)

(Underwood, Cox, and Parker beam down.)

UNDERWOOD: (taking a deep breath) Ah, the sweet smell of Iconian quasirock. Just like old times.

COX: Excuse me?

PARKER: Mister Underwood used to be a Scion-hunter.

COX: A what?

UNDERWOOD: Someone who looks for evidence of the Scions of the Stars. We spent a lot of time in Iconian ruins, looking for mentions, even a link, between those two ancient races.

COX: And that was your life?

UNDERWOOD: I know it sounds silly to you, since you practically grew up with the Scions, but for us they're just legends. Beautiful, noble legends, who promised one day to return to their servants in their hour of need.

COX: "Beautiful, noble legends"? Don't let Zarem hear you say that. Jesus. Let's get going.

(A gentle hum rises as they advance.)

PARKER: This way. The cave forks into two paths just around this bend. If we're going to find our friends in time, we may have to split... [up]

COX: Huh.

UNDERWOOD: I take it that large glowing staircase isn't a regular part of the tour?

PARKER: That's impossible. It leads upward.

COX: Just because your Starfleet surveyors missed it doesn't mean it's impossible. Look up: it just goes deeper into the mountain.

PARKER: The city was built on flat ground. We're not in a mountain.

UNDERWOOD: The Iconians had a certain facility with dimensional manipulation. I'm not surprised it's here; I'm more surprised the bluegills were able to trigger it so quickly.

COX: They must have known exactly what to look for.

PARKER: Commander, it says something on the bottom step. Can you read it?

UNDERWOOD:

Hmmm... My Iconian is a little rusty. This is late third era; if it were any older, we'd be out of luck. Let's see, um... That's a ten, this is a... Two, no, second – join, unite, uh, meet – Ah, here it is, I think. "Seven worlds point to three. Find the second; we will meet." At least, I think it's "worlds."

PARKER: What does it mean?

UNDERWOOD: The Iconians enjoyed riddles, especially the “inverted” variety. You get the final clue first, then find the cryptic hints that explain what you just found.

PARKER: Like saying the punchline before you tell the joke.

UNDERWOOD: Exactly. The Iconians raised it to an art form. We’ll have to go up to find out what the setup is supposed to be.

COX: Hold on. It’s “stars.”

PARKER: Pardon?

COX: “Seven stars”, not “seven worlds.”

UNDERWOOD: I didn’t realize you read Iconian, Skipper.

COX: I didn’t, either. But that language... it’s Scion.

UNDERWOOD: I guarantee you, it’s third-era Iconian.

COX: Then Scions and Iconians share a language. You wanted a link, Underwood? You just found a doozy.

PARKER: Much as I sincerely enjoy paleoxenolinguistics, we have business to attend to, gentlemen.

(He begins to ascend the staircase. The others follow. There’s a big golden flash and all three find themselves at the top of the stairs.)

PARKER: Did everyone feel that?

COX: Didn't just feel it. Look: we're at the top of the stairs.

UNDERWOOD: One of the steps must have activated a teleporter.

PARKER: Or a gateway. Why build the stairs at all, then?

COX: I don't know about your Iconians, Parker, but I'll tell ya the Scions did a lot of things just to show off.

UNDERWOOD: That sounds a bit... irreverent, Skipper.

COX: Yeah, the Scions were always saying that to me, too. Fact is, you can only do business with ancient godlike beings if you take 'em down a peg or two first. Our bugger pals must have gone down this way. We should hurry.

PARKER: Agreed. But — we don't go in guns blazing. First, we need to find out what they're doing here, what their plan is. Second, we need to find out if they brought a Royal.

UNDERWOOD: A Royal? If the Royal dies, every bugger in the system dies, too. They'd have to be fools.

COX: No, just arrogant. And paranoid. The King will be here, because he can't afford not to be.

PARKER: And he'll have the Queen in his belly, because he can't afford to trust anyone else with it.

COX: Damn straight.

PARKER: Phasers ready, heads down, stay quiet, and wait for my signal. Let's hope we aren't too late.

SCENE 4G-04**LOCATION: ICONIAN RUINS – CAVES**

MASTERSON: This is *baktag*. Complete *baktag*.

GWYN: *Baktag*? Careful, ma'am. Your host doesn't speak Klingon.

MASTERSON: There's no one to hear us but you. Speaking of which, can't you turn off that stupid accent now?

GWYN: Unfortunately, it seems to be deeply ingrained in the good doctor's speech centers. I may be Welsh for some time to come.

MASTERSON: What are we supposed to do with this? The obelisk is just a message for the groundlings. We've known how to control the mega-Gateways for hundreds of years. It doesn't give us Avalon.

GWYN: Like a thousand other worlds our cousins have scoured, we couldn't count on finding the road to Avalon here.

MASTERSON: I just thought... the stairwell, the riddle, it seemed so much like a treasure map.

GWYN: And so it was. Just not for us. To answer your question: we call it in. The Gateway control tutorial is obviously unneeded, but there may yet be something on this obelisk that's valuable to the court in Celephais.

MASTERSON: (exhales) Yes, I agree. I'll set up the ansible.

GWYN: I'll make one more full scan of the obelisk. Maybe we missed something.

(While Masterson begins to set up some kind of transmitter equipment, Gwyn scans the obelisk with a standard Federation tricorder.)

UNDERWOOD: They have an ansible!

COX: That's not what worries me most – they're looking for Avalon.

PARKER: Avalon? What is "Avalon"? Besides the obvious allusion.

COX: Forget the allusion; it's one of those funny translator quirks. Avalon was the last refuge of the Iconians, after they were driven from their homeworld. A hidden world, a total secret, built to continue operating on its own for ten million years.

PARKER: Let me guess: filled to the brim with Iconian technology at its peak. Iconian weapons.

UNDERWOOD: More than enough to tip the balance of power in their favor. With Avalon, they could conquer the galaxy.

COX: And they've been chasing Avalon for over a year, with every unit they can spare. Did you hear them? A thousand worlds!

UNDERWOOD: And we're trying to cover the same ground with two starships.

PARKER: And an ansible? What's that? A weapon?

COX: A communications device.

UNDERWOOD: They'll have it set up in a minute, so you can see.

COX: The ansible allows instant communication across any distance. We had one on my ship. Not at all dangerous.

PARKER: That, Skipper Cox, is where you are mistaken.

(Parker stands up.)

PARKER: Commander Masterson!

(He fires his phaser, a quick burst, and hits the ansible, which is ruined in a shower of sparks.)

PARKER: I'm afraid I can't allow you to communicate back with your masters.

MASTERSON: Sir! What a pleasant surprise!

PARKER: I'll give you both one chance to surrender.

GWYN: Surrender, Admiral? It's me! Your doctor!

PARKER: Let's not be glib, sir. Twenty years ago, a race of neural parasites infiltrated Starfleet Command by infesting and controlling the bodies of key Starfleet personnel. You and I both know what you are.

MASTERSON: And you expect to take us prisoner with one phaser? Against our two?

PARKER: I have three phasers, actually. Mister Underwood, Captain Cox...?

(Both Cox and Underwood rise from their concealed positions.)

COX: The girl's mine.

UNDERWOOD: The doctor is covered.

PARKER: ...so you see, after what you did to my senior staff, surrender is an unnecessarily generous offer on my part. As a Starfleet officer, I strongly advise you to take it. But as a friend of the people whose lives you've stolen, I request that you refuse.

GWYN: Skipper Samantha Cox? Is that you?

COX: Glad my reputation still counts for something with the buggers, even after all these years.

GWYN: It's just that I have it on very good authority that you were killed. Several times, actually.

COX: You can't keep a good captain down.

MASTERSON: Congratulations on your return from exile outside the galaxy.

COX: We weren't exiled. We just got lost. You guys, on the other hand...

PARKER: I assume one of you is a Royal. If I kill one of you, that's a fifty-fifty chance I take out every parasite in this star system. Do you really want to keep stalling?

MASTERSON: You've made your point, sir.

PARKER: Don't call me that.

MASTERSON: Very well, Admiral. We're prepared to make a deal.

PARKER: I'm not. If they're not surrendering, Skipper, feel free to take your best guess.

COX: With pleasure, Admiral.

MASTERSON: You may want to hear us out. This deal is your only chance at saving fifty thousand people under your protection.

UNDERWOOD: What?

PARKER: My Starbase.

MASTERSON: Our orders were to destroy it when our mission was complete, along with this obelisk. Erase all evidence we were here.

COX: Which would provide a helpful cover for a few infested officers to disappear back to bugger space.

MASTERSON: A happy side benefit. But we're willing to forego all that in exchange for safe passage.

UNDERWOOD: You're bluffing.

GWYN: She's not. Observe.

(he presses a button on a control padd)

(The obelisk calmly disintegrates, as if in a transporter beam.)

COX: The obelisk!

GWYN: Disintegrated, I'm afraid, quite completely.

MASTERSON: But we have detailed scans, which we're willing to let you have. If you let us all leave, peacefully.

GWYN: Otherwise, the same microsingularity bombs that destroyed the obelisk will breach every antimatter reactor on Starbase Nine-One-One. Fifty thousand dead, and there won't be enough left to identify a single body.

MASTERSON: So, it's your choice, Admiral: you *try* to kill us, we murder your starbase, and we destroy the precious Iconian data we came to collect. Or you keep your starbase, and the data, and we walk away.

GWYN: Sounds like a win-win to me.

(Pause.)

PARKER: You're bluffing. You can't get a signal through to the starbase through the cave walls. You'd have to go outside.

GWYN: I assure you, Admiral, we brought advanced communication equipment with us.

COX: Which he destroyed.

GWYN: Just the ansible.

UNDERWOOD: He's right. They could have modified their communicators. Bluegill technology is centuries ahead of us.

PARKER: I'm not convinced.

MASTERSON: Still, Admiral – even if you might be right, can you take the risk? With so many lives at stake?

(Pause.)

PARKER: A year ago, a man named Brahms came to me and gave me a choice: peace, or utter destruction. I tried choosing peace. But the price was destroying the *Starship Excelsior* and murdering thousands of people. So I said no. I said I'd do the right thing and hope for the best, come what may. (pause) I wonder what I'd say today. Commander Masterson, I can't help noticing that Doctor Gwyn has been deferring to you throughout this conversation.

MASTERSON: So you think that makes me the Royal?

PARKER: No, I think you're cleverer than that. Doctor Gwyn!

GWYN: Admiral?

(Parker fires at Gwyn!)

(Gwyn yells as he dies.)

COX: Fire!

(Cox opens fire, too.)

UNDERWOOD: Firing!

(Underwood opens fire, too. Three beams now hitting Gwyn. He dies the way Dexter Remmick did in "Conspiracy": his head explodes, his abdomen opens wide, a hideous alien starts squealing...)

UNDERWOOD: What's that erupting from his stomach?!

COX: The queen! Keep firing!

(...until it, too, is vaporized.)

PARKER: The queen is dead.

MASTERSON: Ah!

(She falls to the ground, as if fainting)

PARKER
Commander!

SFX: Parker runs to the side of his former lieutenant.

PARKER: Masterson! Masterson! (pause) Allie!

MASTERSON: Good guess... Admiral.

COX: Her bugger is dying. Underwood, where's the scanner data for the obelisk?

(Underwood just picked up a tricorder, and now presses a button on it. It responds with a cranky "access denied" sound.)

UNDERWOOD: Erased.

(He throws the tricorder to the ground.)

MASTERSON: Gone, Admiral. The obelisk is gone... gone... gone.....

COX: The bugger's dead.

PARKER: Commander Masterson.

MASTERSON: Unng... sir?

PARKER: How are you feeling, Commander?

MASTERSON: Sir... nauseous, sir. Glad to be alive.

PARKER: I'm... pleased, Commander, that you weren't the Royal. Is there anything —

COX: Parker, the girl's gotta puke. Lots of nasty stuff in her system. The sooner the better.

MASTERSON: Sir, I want you to know.

PARKER: Underwood — medkit?

UNDERWOOD: Here, sir.

(He hands over a medkit.)

MASTERSON: Sir, you need to know.

PARKER: Rest, Commander. That's an order.

MASTERSON: Brahms was alone, sir. He was alone, and it made him [the man he was in the end.]

PARKER: Commander, I see what you're [saying, but I gave you an order.]

MASTERSON: You aren't alone, sir. You weren't, and you won't be.

(Pause.)

PARKER: We'll give you some privacy, Commander – if that's what you want.

MASTERSON: Thank you, sir.

(Parker rises to his feet and walks some distance away from Masterson.)

(Masterson retches in the background.)

PARKER: Skipper, I wanted to say – I'm sorry about your man. Schmitty.

COX: Thanks. (pause) But you'd do it again, wouldn't you?

PARKER: As I said. I'm sorry.

UNDERWOOD: So... you have your station back, Admiral.

PARKER: And my crew. I wonder how many the bluegills actually took.

COX: You'll find out when you get back. Just remember how important it is this all remains secret.

PARKER: I'll hope for a low number, then. No one will have died, correct?

COX: No one except your Doctor Gwyn there.

PARKER: A good officer. (pause) We'll find some way to explain it. General Hanas may be helpful there.

UNDERWOOD: And what about this "Avalon" they were looking for?

COX: You have to find it first. Plain as that. Whoever gets Avalon gets the galaxy.

UNDERWOOD: And if the bluegills take over the galaxy...

PARKER: Then we all end up with bugs in our heads. Unfortunately, I suspect they just vaporized our best clue.

(Masterson, on the other side of the room, stands and walks over here.)

UNDERWOOD: They were talking about "controlling the mega-gateways." I didn't even realize there were other gateways – besides the one in orbit and the one it's linked to.

PARKER: To access another gateway... it would be a revolution. Who knows what advantages that obelisk could have opened up to us? Even just to understand that clue... "Seven stars point to three."

MASTERSON: Then it sounds like we have a lot of work ahead of us.

PARKER: Commander, I trust you can handle the cover-up.

MASTERSON: You know I can, sir.

PARKER: Underwood, we need to get you back to the *Voltaire*. The hunt for Avalon must continue – and accelerate, now that we finally know what we’re looking for.

UNDERWOOD: Then, can I at least stay for your birthday party, Admiral?

PARKER: Birthday...?

MASTERSON: The Admiral’s birthday was three months ago.

UNDERWOOD: Oh.

PARKER: Captain Cox?

COX: Skipper.

PARKER: You have every right to return home and forget any of this ever happened. You aren’t Starfleet, your crew needs you, and you’ve earned your retirement.

COX: And?

PARKER: And... I’ll make sure you receive the leola root you ordered. Compliments of Starfleet Intelligence.

COX: You’re just going to send me back to Earth?

PARKER: Would you prefer something else?

COX: I... I guess not.

PARKER: Then we'll be in touch. The committee will be depending on your experience and advice.

UNDERWOOD: Committee? What committee?

PARKER: The four of us, Commander. The Admiral, the Aide, the Field Agent, and the Consultant. I believe this mission constituted the inaugural session of the Committee to Save the Galaxy.