

Starship: Excelsior
"Ozymandias"
(Season 3, Episode 7)
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 307-01**LOCATION: SILENT BACKGROUND**

BRAHMS: I met a traveller from an antique land.
He said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:

DOVAN: `My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!
(Pause)
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away".

SCENE 307-02**LOCATION: FLYBY – EXTREME WARP**

(The two bluegill ships rocket past our viewpoint: A beat later, the *Excelsior* and the *Renegade* follow behind.)

UNDERWOOD: *Temporary Commander's Log, Stardate Six-Zero-Zero-Five-Nine-Point-Eight. Commander Underwood recording. The Excelsior must intercept and destroy two enemy battlecruisers before they return to base. Should we fail, the Federation will be caught up in a galactic war it cannot possibly survive. Our saving grace: a rare type of dark matter ion storm is consuming the entire nebula, blocking enemy communications and buying us time.*

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR TURBOLIFT

UNDERWOOD: The situation is grim, to be sure. But I know this ship. If the odds are against us now, our triumph will be that much more glorious. End log.

SHARP: If I didn't know better, I'd say you were trying to boost my morale.

UNDERWOOD: Hmph. Nonsense. (to turbolift) Brig. (to Sharp) You?

SHARP: The same.

UNDERWOOD: You want to talk to Mister Brahms?

SHARP: No. To Phillipe – sorry, to Mister Ermez. Or whatever we call her now. (pause) Him. (pause) It?

UNDERWOOD: I see...

SHARP: I'm not going to do anything to it.

UNDERWOOD: Yes?

SHARP: When she infested my body, she was a bad doctor. Well, obviously, but an unusually bad doctor. I've gone over the records, and you could have done a better job — no offense, sir.

UNDERWOOD: Only a little taken. Go on.

SHARP: But she made huge advances in my research. That story about how she was working on the Wasting — it wasn't just a cover story. She studied the virus inside and out, and had insights into the nucleic acids light-years ahead of me. She's brought us years closer to a cure.

UNDERWOOD: But, if she doesn't know anything about medicine...

SHARP: Exactly. (pause) Have you seen the Captain?

UNDERWOOD: No, I haven't. (pause) But he gave me his fullest confidence before assigning me to manage the pursuit.

SHARP: While he...?

UNDERWOOD: ...is in his quarters, working on a... separate project.

SHARP: I see.

(Pause.)

SHARP: You know, I'm a licensed counselor. I could check — [in on him.]

UNDERWOOD: Please do, Doctor.

(Contemplative silence.)

SHARP: Underwood?

UNDERWOOD: Mm?

SHARP: During the War. On the front lines. Did it always feel like this? Every day?

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Not every day.

(The turbolift stops and the doors open.)

SCENE 307-03**LOCATION: BRIG**

(Yubari is pacing in front of Brahms.)

YUBARI: Fine. Then can we talk about Gevinon now, General?

BRAHMS: Mister now, not General.

YUBARI: Well I can't just call you Isaac, can I. General, we need – [information!]

BRAHMS: I'm not a general, Asuka.

YUBARI: And I'm not Asuka!

BRAHMS: What?

(She stops pacing.)

YUBARI: When you found me in London, you just read my patient chart and started calling me Asuka, didn't you? Now everyone calls me that. Even the computer.

BRAHMS: ...That is your name.

YUBARI: No, it's not. My name is pronounced Asuka Yubari ("AH-skuh YOO-bar-ee") Asuka Yubari ("ah-SOO-kah yoo-BAR-ee") is what I'm called.

BRAHMS: Is there a point to this... Asuka (AH-skuh)?

YUBARI: You don't get to decide who you are, General. Now let's talk about Gevinon.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: It's the base of operations for the bluegill ships we're chasing. What else?

BRAHMS: We never learned very much. Too risky to get close. We know that, twenty years ago, it was an aquatic species, no contact with the galaxy, no planetary defenses. When the War came, the Gevinese were infested overnight. Their bodies live on, of course, controlled by bluegills in the deeps of Gevinon's ocean. We believe they even reproduce... but the natives' souls were wiped clean a long time ago. It's a fortress world now.

YUBARI: We've been chasing them for sixteen hours. At current speeds, we'll catch up in thirty. How close are we to Gevinon? Are we going to stop them in time?

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: No. (pause) But it's going to be close.

YUBARI: Alright. I'll inform the Engine Room. What can you tell me — [about their weapon systems?]

(She is interrupted by Brahms's combadge.)

OPERATIONS: *Renegade to General Brahms. Come in, General.*

YUBARI: Where is that coming from? Your combadge...

BRAHMS: --was confiscated, yes. It's amazing what you can plant under the skin these days.

YUBARI: But the brig's forcefields — [should make transmissions impossible!]

BRAHMS: Are not as secure as your division likes to imagine.

YUBARI: You can't take that call.

BRAHMS: I've missed my check-in by over an hour. They're worried about me. If I don't answer, they'll attempt a rescue.

YUBARI: If you do answer, you could help coordinate that rescue. "Don't give dangerous prisoners their phone call." You taught me that.

BRAHMS:

I'm not going to try to escape. We can't afford it right now. Trust me, Asuka (pronounced ah-SOO-kah)

(Pause.)

OPERATIONS: *Renegade to the General. Please report.*

YUBARI: Fine. Go ahead. (pause) But I'm not going anywhere.

BRAHMS: I wouldn't want you to.

(He hits his wrist, creating a combadge-like activation noise.)

BRAHMS: Damocles here, *Renegade*.

OPERATIONS: *Your status?*

BRAHMS: Condition green, all's well.

OPERATIONS: *Noted.*

BRAHMS: Report.

OPERATIONS: *Engines are nearing operational limits. We cannot keep pace with the Excelsior on our own.*

"Condition green" is an old code phrase, another of Brahms's homages to Captain Kirk. In "Errand of Mercy," Kirk used the phrase to signal that his landing party was compromised, but not in immediate peril, and that the *Enterprise* crew was to take no action. Brahms is sending the same signal to his crew, and Yubari has no idea.

BRAHMS: Use the *Excelsior's* warp trail to help maintain velocity. I'll see to it they know you're coming. Anything else?

TACTICAL: *Tactical here, sir. It's this ion storm.*

BRAHMS: Our luckiest break in years.

TACTICAL: *I know, sir. But... something's not right about it.*

BRAHMS: This is no time to be coy, Tactical.

TACTICAL: *I'm sorry, sir. I can't be precise. It's just an instinct. Something about the electric potentials – it's like I've seen this pattern before.*

BRAHMS: Trust your instincts, then, but report back to me when you have facts.

TACTICAL: *Aye, sir.*

BRAHMS: Brahms out.

YUBARI: I have to make my report.

(She stands, crosses to the Brig forcefield.)

BRAHMS: I understand.

YUBARI: Ensign Hertzler, drop the forcefield.

(He does so, and Yubari walks out towards the Brig doors.)

YUBARI: Raise forcefield.

(The forcefield goes back up, and Yubari exits the Brig.)

LOCATION: CORRIDOR

UNDERWOOD: Ah, Miz Yubari.

YUBARI: Sir.

SHARP: Asuka, I've been looking all over for you. I'm sorry about those things I said when the parasite – [had control over me.]

YUBARI: I have duties to attend to, Doctor.

(She walks on down the corridor.)

SHARP: I might kill that parasite after all.

UNDERWOOD: Give her time, Doctor.

SCENE 307-03**LOCATION: BRIG**

(In Brahm's cell, an intercom chimes.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: They won't make it, you know. (pause.) Isaac Brahm, I'm talking to you!

BRAHMS: Mister Ermez... or whatever the cockroach in Ensign Ermez's brain is called... you're wasting your energy. Even if I were under any optimistic delusions, I'm already behind bars. The only reason your taunting interests me is How did you hack into the brig's intercom system?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: The same way I hacked the *Excelsior's* warp engines, Brahm: months of hard work.

BRAHMS: What? The warp engines?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Mm. Yes. I left some interesting programs running in the ship's computer, General. And let me promise you: as long as I live, the *Excelsior* will never intercept those battleships.

THEME SONG

(Standard opening credits for the first time in what seems like *ages*.)

ROL: *Michael Liebmann as Alex Rol*

UNDERWOOD: *Also featuring Gareth Bowley as Lieutenant Commander Joshua Underwood*

NARRATOR: *The Sword of Damocles, Part Seven: "Ozymandias"*

SCENE 307-04**LOCATION: DREAMSPACE**

NEEVA: *Well, this is just great. (pause.) I was finally starting to enjoy myself again, you know! Alright, so I missed a few of the annual sacrifices. Okay – a lot of them – but what do the Dead need burnt offerings for, anyway, you know? It's time the Dead joined the twenty-fourth century like the rest of us! (pause) Well, alright, fine, I'm an apostate, but you didn't need to kill me over it!*

(Pause.)

NEEVA: *You hear me?!*

(Silence)

NEEVA: ANYONE!

(Pause.)

NEEVA: *...am I alone?*

(Pause.)

ESPLIN/NEEVA: No.

NEEVA: Who's there?

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Only me.

NEEVA: *You look just like me.*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Do I?

NEEVA: *Well... my uniform's torn, I'm cut all over, grimy... and you're clean. You're clean and naked. Other than that...*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Heh. I suppose that's true.

NEEVA: *So. Are you supposed to my guide or something? A guardian angel? Does Orion mythology even have angels?*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: I wouldn't call myself an angel, no. What's your name?

NEEVA: *You look just like me and you don't know my name?*

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Neeva.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Neeva. A beautiful name. For the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. I'm sorry. Please believe me. I'm so sorry.

NEEVA: *Yeah, so am I. Honestly, I was expecting the Dead would vote me to a higher level of the afterlife. Someplace with a little more scenery than an infinite black void.*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Afterlife?

NEEVA: *Yes... I am dead, right?*

(Silence.)

NEEVA: *I am dead, right?*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: I'm sorry. I'm sorry; I have to.

NEEVA: *No, you don't. (pause) Have to what?*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (crying) Don't we all deserve a chance at living? Just one chance?

NEEVA: *What have you done?*

ESPLIN/NEEVA: You won't even feel it. Or know what's happening. I'm so sorry, Neeva!

(There's an odd, quiet little noise, as Esplin disappears.)

NEEVA: *Come back here!* (pause) *Where did you – [go?]*

LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER - DRY ROOM

(Neeva (really, ESPLIN/NEEVA controlling Neeva) has been lying on the metal floor sleeping, but suddenly her whole upper body shoots erect as her eyes fly open. She's gasping for air.)

(Lorhrok, also under parasite control (his is named "Temrash"), dashes a short distance to her side.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Esplin!

(Esplin/Neeba sobs. Temrash/Lorhrok kneels down.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Esplin! What happened? Was it a nightmare?

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (through unyielding tears) I saw her! I saw her, Temrash! Oh, Scions, she's alive in there!

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Oh, no.

(Temrash/Lorhrok holds her close; she continues weeping into his arms.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: It's okay. It's okay. Shhh. You're okay.

(Simon, also possessed by a parasite, runs an alien scanner over Neeva's body.)

YIDRIL/SIMON: The host must have a tolerance for the suppressant. Could be that body – I've never seen one with such complex hormones before. We need more drugs. A lot more.

THE MAJOR: We don't have it. This is a ship built for aquatics – they had to stow us in this empty crawlspace because it's the only part of the ship with air. You think they've got a medical bay equipped for... for her?

YIDRIL/SIMON: Esplin's cohabitation is failing, and it's a miracle we beamed that host off the *Anbar* at all! You could at least try!

THE MAJOR: I'll do my best.

(The Major stomps away and activates a comm panel.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Shhh. You're safe now, on a Zeero ship. We're going home to Gevinon. All that time on the *Anbar* in the dark without host bodies... it's over.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (still through tears)
Temrash, I don't think I can go through with this.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Hey. Hey. Just try to breathe, Esplin.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Temrash, she's not just a body – her name is Neeva.

THE MAJOR: (in background) Control, one of our people isn't responding to the suppressants you gave us.

CONTROL VOICE: (in background) *ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu*.

THE MAJOR: (in background) Yes, I know you're not equipped for "landwalkers." There's still got to be something – [you can do!]

CONTROL VOICE: (in background) *R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn*.

THE MAJOR: (in background) You know what this is like for the girl! You have to – [try!]

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Hey, now. You're not just a body, either. Your name is Esplin. And I love you.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: I love you, too, Temrash.

CONTROL VOICE: (in background) *lä! lä! Cthulhu Fhtagn!*

THE MAJOR: (in background) Well, never let it be said that the aquatics suffered from an overabundance of empathy!

(He terminates the connection.)

THE MAJOR: And I thought the Zeero were all on the same side.

SCENE 307-05**LOCATION: FLYBY – EXTREME WARP**

(The two bluegill ships rocket past our viewpoint: A beat later, the *Excelsior* and the *Renegade* follow behind.)

SCENE 307-06**LOCATION: ENGINEERING**

ADOW: Did Ermez say he'd compromised the flow regulators?

BRAHMS: No.

ADOW: Good. He'd be lying. How 'bout the dorsal inhibitors?

BRAHMS: He didn't — [specify, Chief.]

UNDERWOOD: Chief, is there anything — [that might be getting overlooked here?]

ADOW: --wrong with any of our subsystems? No, not one, but since I knew old Lumpy here wouldn't leave without a full inventory...

BRAHMS: 'Lumpy?'

UNDERWOOD: So you thought it necessary to waste our time, Chief?

ADOW: Me? An enlisted woman, waste the time of an officer? Heaven forbid, sir!

UNDERWOOD: Alright, Ch[ief, you've made your point.)

ADOW: I mean, what if you'd been in the middle of something really important, like breaking the all-time ion storm speed record, without shattering the hull into a billion pieces, and I just showed up and started asking inane questions about non-existent malfunctions?

UNDERWOOD: You've made your point.

ADOW: Now that could be really dangerous, couldn't it? (Pause) Besides, Brahms is lying anyway.

BRAHMS: (simultaneous) What?

UNDERWOOD: (simultaneous) What?

ADOW: The commlink in the brig wasn't energized at all today. Especially not by another prisoner. Lots of other traffic on that circuit, but none from the brig.

UNDERWOOD: What? Mister Brahms, is this true?

BRAHMS: Of course not. Ermez has covered his tracks somehow.

ADOW: Or you're trying to worm your way into engineering because it gives you critical systems access.

YUBARI: You are way out of line, Chief!

ADOW: This man once detonated a bomb on our shield generator!

YUBARI: He's entitled to your respect.

ADOW: I have to respect officers. Not dishonorable discharges... ma'am.

YUBARI: He's a guest.

UNDERWOOD: I'm afraid he's a prisoner. And that does... have consequences. Escort him back to his cell, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: Underwood, Ermez's virus — [has to be found.]

UNDERWOOD: That is an order, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: Aye, sir. General.

BRAHMS: Mm.

(Yubari and Brahms walk away.)

ADOW: I have a warp engine to save.

UNDERWOOD: That was a bit rough, even for you, Adow.

ADOW: Like I said. Engine to save. Alone, with a bunch of... half-baked warp-jockeys.

UNDERWOOD: We all miss Mister Lorchrok, Chief.

ADOW: Do you? Do you really? How many times did you ever even speak to Aleczahnder Lorchrok?

UNDERWOOD: Well, we worked – [together on a few occasions.]

ADOW: Bull! You haven't said ten words to Alecz in a month. To any of us below decks! You've been too busy romancing the captain's chair. (pause) Well, now you've got it, unless Dovan stops hiding in his quarters. Make it count for something more'n sympathy cards.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: You're very lucky I now believe in second chances, Chief.

ADOW: Yeah? Why's that?

UNDERWOOD: Because that was your first. Dismissed.

(She stands to attention, then walks away.)

SCENE 307-06a**LOCATION: FLYBY – EXTREME WARP**

(The two bluegill ships rocket past our viewpoint: A beat later, the *Excelsior* and the *Renegade* follow behind.)

SCENE 307-07**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER - DRY ROOM**

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Are you absolutely sure you want to go through with this?

ESPLIN/NEEVA: I can't just stay awake for the rest of the trip back, Temrash. This body is so... so...

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Tired.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: It's the most beautiful sensation I've ever felt.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Hey!

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Oh, don't worry. There'll be plenty of time for more of this humanoid... uh, "kissing" when we're back on Gevinon.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: We could keep each other awake, you know. It's only another twenty hours.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Temrash... I need to do this. I owe it to her.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: You don't owe this "Neeva" woman anything. She'll only try to hurt you.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: She's a part of me now.

(Pause.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Alright, but I'm gonna be here the whole time. Hold my hand as tight as you can.

(Pause.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Esplin, you're crying.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Just these hormones. I love you, Temrash. You make this okay.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Shhhh... Shhhh...

YIDRIL/SIMON: Oh, enough already. Can't anyone else get some sleep around here?

THE MAJOR: Don't be an ass, Yidril. Oh! There! I named your bugger, Lee!

YIDRIL/SIMON: Well, 'scuse me.

TEMRASH/LORHROK: Esplin...?

(No response.)

TEMRASH/LORHROK: I'll be here when you wake up, beautiful.

LOCATION: BEACH (DREAMSCAPE)

ESPLIN: Neeva?

NEEVA: *A beach. (pause) Why a beach this time, instead of the void?*

ESPLIN: To be honest, I don't know. I think this marvelous humanoid brain just knew where we needed to be.

NEEVA: *My marvelous humanoid brain.*

ESPLIN: Neeva...

NEEVA: *It's not yours.*

ESPLIN: *Yes. It is. My brain, my body, my... [heart].*

ESPLIN: (to self) This is so wrong.

NEEVA: *Then get the hell out. I promise I won't squish you.*

ESPLIN: Not that. This. Talking. (pause) Coming here was a mistake.

NEEVA: *Your conscience isn't a mistake.*

ESPLIN: Don't lecture me about my conscience! I'm not one of these people who takes a fifth host and just goes out to have a cheeseburger! This is my one chance!

NEEVA: *I don't care if you cry over it daily for the rest of your life! I'm still dead!*

ESPLIN: Oh, like that's something I could prevent? Like if I'd passed you up there weren't a dozen other first-pool applicants chomping at my heels? What was I supposed to – ? (pause) Oh... Scions. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I came in here to... Your body's emotions are so, so...

NEEVA: *They can be a little overwhelming.*

ESPLIN: Nothing I read – [about cohabitation prepared me for this.]

NEEVA: *Probably all written by men. Welcome to the female race.*

ESPLIN: Can we start again?

(Silence)

ESPLIN: I'm called Esplin.

NEEVA: *I'm Neeva. Get out of my body.*

ESPLIN: Oh, Neeva, I wish I could.

NEEVA: *You can.*

ESPLIN: But I can't! Temrash is a king now. He can't wait for... [me anymore] (Pause) Oh, Temrash. His hand must have fallen off by now, I'm squeezing so hard.

NEEVA: *You know, I have people I love, too. There's a professor in New Berlin – [named Jason Fellows. When I was an abandoned child, he adopted me.]*

ESPLIN: Neeva, I see what you're trying to do. And I understand. I hear you. I want you to know that. And I'm sure it was terrible for you, when our shock troops on the *Anbar* took you the first time. (Pause) But by the time Temrash gave this body to me, it was just lying there on the floor, empty. There were two potential lives to fill it up with: yours, and mine.

NEEVA: *Potential lives? There was nothing "potential" about my life. I had a beating heart – memories, experiences –*

ESPLIN: You were... what's that amazing word you have – You were unconscious. Such a humanoid concept. No memories, no emotions, no self-awareness at all. Just empty flesh, waiting to be filled.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: *Rehearsed that one pretty well, did you?*

ESPLIN: Neeva, you're not making this any easier.

NEEVA: *Good.*

ESPLIN: I mean for either of us. (Pause) I won't waste this body you've nurtured. I know how much you're sacrificing.

NEEVA: *Sacrifice shouldn't be confused with rape.*

ESPLIN: What would you do in my place?

NEEVA: *Not – [this!]*

ESPLIN: Honestly.

NEEVA: *You think I'm not being honest?*

ESPLIN: Neeva, we're blind in our natural state. Deaf. Helpless. No real sensation to speak of. (Pause) But I still fell in love, and now I have a chance to explore it as beings were meant to explore it. (Pause) One more time: what would you do, Neeva?

(Pause.)

NEEVA: *Honestly? (pause) I... don't – [know.]*

ESPLIN: (Gasp!) That hurts!

NEEVA: *What, Esplin? What's wrong?*

ESPLIN: I don't... I can't... Temrash let go of my hand. I think I'm waking up.

NEEVA: *And what about me?*

ESPLIN: I... I'll come back, Neeva. I promise. We're not – [finished!]

LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (suddenly choking on her sentence) —FINISHED! Anjin! Let go of my gill! I can't breathe! Are you out of your mind?!

(Esplin begins to struggle against the Major's hold in earnest, kicking and rustling on the metal floor while the Major tries to keep his grip on her gill.)

THE MAJOR: No, Esplin, I'm not out of my mind. I'm a Starfleet marine who's sworn his life to the defense of crew and country. And I will do anything to ensure their safety. (Pause) (growls) And I've got this just about down to a science!

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (gasping) Wha... what — ?

THE MAJOR: What am I doing? That's easy. I'm strangling you. I've got your gill pinched shut and you're suffocating. You've got one, maybe two minutes left. Your only hope is to let her go and crawl out here where there's air.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: The others will wake up. You won't — get away with this.

THE MAJOR: When they wake up — and they will — it will be as my shipmates again.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: What do you mean?

THE MAJOR: I mean they put up a lot less struggle than you did. Look.

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Temrash. No -

THE MAJOR: He's not in there anymore. He's squirming in that puddle of vomit. See?

ESPLIN/NEEVA: (Makes a horrible screeching/gurgling sound)

ESPLIN/NEEVA: Temrash! I — ! [I love... you]

(And Esplin is dead of suffocation before she can finish.)

Pause.

(The Major pulls the bugged out through the back of Neeva's neck. It makes a nasty, slimy noise. Then he sighs in relief.)

NEEVA: Ahh... wha?

THE MAJOR: Ma'am! Stay with me, ma'am!

NEEVA: Am I awake?

THE MAJOR: Just lie back, ma'am. You had it worse than any of us.

NEEVA: What about Esplin? Where is she?

THE MAJOR: It's dead, ma'am.

NEEVA: Oh.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am?

(Lohrok groans)

NEEVA: Tend to our commander.

THE MAJOR: Yes, ma'am.

(The Major shifts positions.)

THE MAJOR: Sir. You're still with us, sir.

LORHROK: (takes a very deep breath) M... Major? Where... what happened? (suddenly gags) Maker... did I just throw up?

THE MAJOR: Sir, you can rinse your mouth out with this.

LORHROK: Thanks. (gulps the water down, swishes it around, spits it out)

LORHROK: Spast. That's better. Where? This doesn't look like the *Anbar*. And... come to think of it, didn't the *Anbar* blow up? With us on board?

THE MAJOR: It was almost much worse than that, sir. At the last moment, a bluegill ship was able to get a transporter lock. They infested us. You've been under their control for more than a day. We're now in a special dry compartment on an aquatic enemy ship. They're taking us to a world called Gevinon Prime.

LORHROK: The team? Neeva. Neeva, are you alright?

THE MAJOR: It's okay.

NEEVA: Yeah, I'm fine.

THE MAJOR: Simon's over there, sir, sleeping it off. His bugger was my first kill, so it went a little harder on him. The rest of my team... never got off the *Anbar*.

NEEVA: How did you break through the control?

THE MAJOR: A little inoculation I got months ago, ma'am, courtesy of General Brahms. We call it Beetlejuice.

LORHROK: General Brahms!

THE MAJOR: Anjin is still in my head, but I'm calling all the shots. (pause) What now, sir?

LORHROK: That depends.

NEEVA: On?

LORHROK: On the Major's involvement with General Isaac Brahms.

THE MAJOR: Sir, we need to disable this ship's engines.

LORHROK: Not until you two tell me what the hell is going on. (Pause) That's an order!

THE MAJOR: Sir, that's a big question, and we don't have a lot of time.

LORHROK: Then give us the digest version.

THE MAJOR: Sir... Yes, sir. (Pause) We call it the Sword of Damocles.

SCENE 307-08**LOCATION: BRIG**

SHARP: Ensign Hertzler, lower the forcefield.

(Hertzler does so.)

SHARP: Raise forcefield.

(It raise.)

SHARP: I'm back.

(Silence.)

SHARP: Do we at least get to talk this time?

(Pause.)

SHARP: A month in my head and you never shut up about how strong you were. Where'd that go... Old Mole? (pause.) Look, I don't have an hour to spend here staring at you like I did this morning, so if you're not ready to brag about your infinite cleverness on my Wasting research, say so and I'll come back. (Pause.) Look, don't make me get the Romulan mind probes.

(Pause.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: You'd use those?

SHARP: We don't actually have any.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: (contemptuous scoff)

(Pause.)

SHARP: Fine. I know you're really busy staring ahead and not messing with Brahms's head. I'll come back. Ensign Hertzler!

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Somebody would.

SHARP: Stand by, Ensign. What was that?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Somebody would use those mind-probes and not bat an eye.

SHARP: Not in my Starfleet.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: That Wasting of yours. Didn't you notice?

SHARP: Probably. Depends what you're thinking of.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Don't play that game with me, Old Mole. Whatever else has gone on between us, don't ever think you can outsmart me.

(Pause.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Your Wasting is a telepathic virus, yes?

SHARP: Yes.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: And we Zeero —

SHARP: Is that you call yourselves?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: As it happens, yes. We Zeero are also telepaths, of a sort. In the nest, we perceive through telepathy. Our families are bound together by our queens — because to break one's link with the queen, by distance or by injury, is to die, quickly and painfully.

SHARP: Which is why you've stayed so close to the Ermez host body since the day you took it — as the last survivor of your family in enemy territory, you didn't have anywhere else to put your queen.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Yes.

SHARP: So?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Why does the telepathic profile of the Wasting exactly match the telepathic profile of one of our queens?

SHARP: What?

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: You never noticed?

SHARP: I've had trouble — [restarting my research since I got my life back, thank you very much.]

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: You're a bigger idiot than I thought. Get out.

SHARP: You're not in — [a position to give orders.]

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: (snarl) Get out!

(Pause.)

SHARP: I'm late for my other appointment. Ensign Hertzler, lower the forcefield.

(The forcefield falls.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Other appointment?

SHARP: A harder case than you. But we're not done.

(She steps out.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Oh, I think we are. I'll see you on the other side, Old Mole.

SHARP: Raise forcefield.

(The forcefield goes up.)

SHARP: We are going to reach those ships before it's too late.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Oh, I don't doubt it.

SHARP: Then what did... you... [mean?]

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Don't trouble your little brain about it, Old Mole.

(Silence, then, then Sharp walks away and exits the brig.)

SCENE 307-09**LOCATION: DOVAN'S QUARTERS**

(The door chimes)

DOVAN: No.

(The door chimes)

DOVAN: That means go away.

(The door chimes)

DOVAN: That's an order!

(The door slides open.)

SHARP: Medical override.

DOVAN: Pulling the medical card already? Usually my counselors try to chit-chat before threatening to relieve me.

SHARP: And I've read your medical record, so I know how well that worked for them. But I'm not here to threaten. I just want to talk.

DOVAN: Wonderful. You do the talking; I'll stay over here and do the working.

SHARP: Alcar... you're lying in bed staring at the ceiling.

DOVAN: Well, I'm not asleep, so I'm working.

SHARP: Staring is work?

DOVAN: Not staring! What's one of those words for "staring" medical-types love?
(Pause) I'm meditating.

SHARP: Then meditate on this. Your ship is in the greatest danger it's ever been. It needs a captain.

DOVAN: Has one. Name of Underwood, Joshua Wardell.

SHARP: He's doing everything he can. So is the crew.

DOVAN: Then you don't need me, do you?

SHARP: It's not enough. We're barely holding Warp Nine in this ion storm.

DOVAN: Sounds like what you really need's a chief engineer. And we're fresh out. I got him killed looking for ghosts.

SHARP: They're even talking about outfitting the hull with holo-emitters to make us look like one of them.

DOVAN: What good would that do?

SHARP: They don't know yet. We're just a few hours from Gevinon, and we need a plan.

DOVAN: The last person you want in charge of that plan is the man who destroyed the Federation – and everyone else, for that matter.

SHARP: The Federation's still out there. And the sun will still rise over the blue-and-white stars until the moment we let those battlecruisers reach port.

DOVAN: Captain Cortez said I needed to be out here. I bet the galaxy on her word. If I was wrong about that, I have no place on my bridge.

SHARP: Captain, it's obvious that this mission has left you – [wallowing in adolescent self-pity.]

DOVAN: 'Emotionally compromised?' Obviously. What are you going to do about it? Relieve me of command? Got that one covered for you.

SHARP: I was going to say 'wallowing in adolescent self-pity,' but 'emotionally compromised' does the job.

DOVAN: I love these little chats we have, Melissa. Now, if you'll excuse me? I have a lot to think about.

(Pause.)

SHARP: Sometimes I wonder what Captain Cortez saw in you.

DOVAN: Only sometimes?

SHARP: Pity her log was blown up.

DOVAN: Got that right. That log would have stopped me a long time before I threw away my career and destroyed the galaxy.

SHARP: Good bye, Alcar.

DOVAN: Later, Melissa.

(Sharp walks out.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Except... her log wasn't the only thing Rachel Cortez left behind, was it?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Computer, are the captain's personal effects still on board?

COMPUTER: *Captain Cortez's effects were scheduled for transfer on Stardate Six-Zero-Zero-Zero-Five-Point-Zero. Transfer was cancelled for an unknown reason.*

DOVAN: Because I stole the ship, that's why. So they're still on board? Where?

COMPUTER: *Cargo Bay One.*

(Dovan stands up. He starts walking partway into his line.)

DOVAN: I've been through them before, of course... But now I know what to look for.

(He exits to corridor.)

SCENE 307-10**LOCATION: BRIDGE**

ROL: Velocity has fallen to Warp Eight-point-Six.

UNDERWOOD: Dammit.

ROL: Enemy velocity down to Warp Eight-point-One.

UNDERWOOD: Alright. That's actually the largest margin yet. What's our updated ETA to the Gevinon heliopause?

ROL: Twenty-seven minutes. (Pause) Threat vessels will arrive in twenty-four point five.

UNDERWOOD: A thousand damns! We're running out of options! Miz Yubari, could you – That doesn't look like a tactical map, Lieutenant.

YUBARI: No, sir. I'm reviewing the brig security logs from this morning.

UNDERWOOD: Didn't Chief Adow already render her expert judgement on that?

YUBARI: Yes. Which is why I'm reviewing the logs myself.

UNDERWOOD: Lieutenant.

YUBARI: Sir, if General Brahms is right –

UNDERWOOD: Mister Brahms, but go on.

YUBARI: If he's right, and there is a virus in our warp systems, finding it may be the only hope we have of catching those ships.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Very well. Carry on.

(As Underwood speaks, the turbolift doors open and admit Dr. Sharp. She approaches.)

UNDERWOOD: Doctor.

SHARP: Please. Melissa.

UNDERWOOD: You spoke to the captain?

SHARP: Yes, I did.

YUBARI: (in background) Huh. That's weird.

UNDERWOOD: And the status of his... "project"?

SHARP: He's quite committed to it. But he reaffirmed his complete faith in your abilities to manage the situation.

UNDERWOOD: I won't let him down.

SHARP: May I?

UNDERWOOD: Please.

(Sharp sits)

UNDERWOOD: How is he really?

SHARP: Stubborn.

(Computer alert at Yubari's console.)

YUBARI: Captain.

UNDERWOOD: Yes, Leftenant.

YUBARI: General Brahms wasn't lying to us.

UNDERWOOD: Then we do have a computer virus?

YUBARI: No, sir. But there's about to be a jailbreak.

UNDERWOOD: Excuse me?

YUBARI: Yubari to brig. Yubari to brig. Ensign Hertzler, please respond. (Pause)
Ermez has already cut the comm lines. There's no time to explain; I have to get down there.

UNDERWOOD: Go.

SHARP: I'm coming with you.

YUBARI: I'd prefer you didn't, Doctor.

UNDERWOOD: Overruled. Both of you: get down there. Armed.

YUBARI: Yes, sir.

(Yubari and Sharp both head for the turbolift.)

SCENE 307-11**LOCATION: FLYBY – EXTREME WARP**

(The two bluegill ships rocket past our viewpoint: A beat later, the *Excelsior* and the *Renegade* follow behind. We can now hear the ion storm.)

SCENE 307-12**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM**

NEEVA: Are we ready to move on to the failsafes?

LORHROK: Still waiting on those improvised polaron struts. Simon!

SIMON: Got 'em here, boss.

THE MAJOR: Sir, I beg your pardon, but... you must hurry. There isn't much time left, sir.

NEEVA: Hey, Major! You ever tried to blow up a ship's engines using nothing but a single replicator terminal?

THE MAJOR: Ma'am. No, ma'am.

NEEVA: Well, we're trying to disable two ships' engines using nothing but a single replicator terminal. If it works at all, this man should get a medal.

LORHROK: If it works at all, I should get a nap. Neeva, flip that circuit breaker.

NEEVA: This yellow one?

LORHROK: That's it.

NEEVA: Don't look so worried, Major. We'll make it.

SIMON: How can you be sure?

NEEVA: Because if we don't, this Sword of Damocles thing utterly annihilates everything you've ever known or loved. (Pause) No pressure or anything.

SCENE 307-13**LOCATION: BRIG**

BRAHMS: Ensign, would you please lower the forcefield?

HERTZLER: Sir?

BRAHMS: Ensign, it's urgent that you lower this forcefield.

(The ensign approaches.)

HERTZLER: I'm sorry, sir, but you know I can't do that. Is there something you needed from me?

BRAHMS: Yes. I needed you to take a few steps closer. (Pause)*Renegade*, transceiver routine four, execute!

(An electrostatic burst leaps from Brahms's wrist into the brig forcefield. The forcefield shorts out. The electrical tendrils hit the ensign, too, and he goes down as if struck by a heavy taser.)

HERTZLER: Aggh!

(Some residual sparking continues from the burned-out wall panel.)

BRAHMS: Like I said, it's amazing what you can plant under the skin these days. (Pause) Except... I didn't actually expect that to work.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Then why try it at all, Brahms?

BRAHMS: Because we're out of time.

(Brahms reaches down and takes the ensign's phaser out of its holster.)

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: What now? Call to your ship for a rescue beam-out?

(Brahms charges the phaser.)

BRAHMS: Oh, no. There isn't time for that. (Pause) There's only time for you... Mister Ermez.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: I love it when you call me that, Brahms. Reminds me how completely I pulled the wool over your eyes. How totally I've beaten you.

BRAHMS: We'll see about that. Computer, raise a forcefield on this section of the brig, secure code Three-One.

(A larger forcefield pops up near the door and the ensign's prone form.)

(Brahms presses some buttons on the panel outside Ermez's cell. The cell forcefield falls. He steps in.)

BRAHMS: I'm very interested in that virus you uploaded to the Excelsior's warp drive, 'Ensign'. Very interested.

ERMEZ: You've got less than twenty minutes to break me.

BRAHMS: I won't need twenty seconds.

ERMEZ: Big talk. How long did it take you to catch me? Oh, right: (Pause) you never — [did.]

(Brahms slams a left hook into Ermez's chin. Ermez grunts in surprise and pain then tumbles backwards into the far wall and slumps there.)

(Brahms calmly steps closer. Then Brahms phasers a neat circle out of the wall near Ermez, exposing an EPS conduit, which Brahms carefully grabs.)

BRAHMS: This is an exposed lead from the EPS relay. Do you know how it would feel to have this rubbed across your forehead?

ERMEZ: No.

BRAHMS: Like this.

(The conduit's whine changes frequency, going still higher and getting a little louder when Brahms touches it to Ermez's forehead. Ermez shrieks in pain.)

BRAHMS: I'm in no mood for sparring. Tell me what you did to the engines.

ERMEZ: (panting a little) I thought you... you opposed torture, Brahms. Never let your... officers do it, anyway.

BRAHMS: Torture is ineffective and immoral. (Pause) Most of the time.

(He applies the lead to Ermez's stomach. Ermez's uniform burns away, and the flesh beneath sears. Ermez screams.)

BRAHMS: What did you do to the engines?

ERMEZ: (panting again) What kind of a soldier... do you think I am? You think I'll just... tell you? So you'll stop... poking me with that thing?

BRAHMS: Oh, no, Mister Ermez. We are far beyond that. I let the Federation be destroyed. For that I deserve to die. But you wanted it to happen. You made it happen. If it weren't for you... I'd be on my ship...

(He shocks Ermez. Ermez grunts in pain.)

BRAHMS: The colonists on New Victoria would be starting harvest season.

(He shocks Ermez who screams.)

BRAHMS: And everything I've given up, everything my sister died for, would still!

(He shocks Ermez who screams.)

BRAHMS: Mean! (He shocks Ermez who screams.) Something!

(He shocks Ermez who screams.)

BRAHMS: We are way past bargaining for your life, parasite. Your only choice is how long this lasts.

ERMEZ: (chuckling) Now that's more like it, Isaac. Doctor Sharp was so – [insipid.]

(Brahms again shocks Ermez who screams.)

BRAHMS: Tell me about the engines.

(The cargo bay doors open as Ermez cries out. Yubari and Sharp see what's going on inside before the doors are open.)

SHARP: (near simultaneous) The guard is down! Ensign!

YUBARI: (near simultaneous) General! No! Stop!

(Yubari runs in and slams into the forcefield. She cries out in pain as she hits it.)

(Sharp goes to the Ensign. She runs a medical tricorder over him and injects him with a hypospray.)

BRAHMS: Asuka. I don't want you to see this. You should wait outside.

SHARP: (in background) Ensign Hertzler.

YUBARI: General, you were right.

SHARP: (in background) Lifesigns are stable.

SHARP: (in background) You're going to be alright.

BRAHMS: You found the warp engine virus?

YUBARI: No, there is no virus. But Ermez did talk to you this morning.

SHARP: What do you mean?

ERMEZ: (through labored panting and gritted teeth) She's... lying.

YUBARI: Adow was right that nobody used the brig comm circuits this morning. But she's still a base monkey at heart. She doesn't know every nook and cranny of this ship like Chief Lorhrok did. The brig used to be bigger, sir. It was downsized in the last overhaul, and the excess space converted to crew quarters for the marines. But those quarters still share some circuits with the brig. When I checked the security logs, I noticed a lot of computer traffic in Sergeant Ben'lat's quarters this morning.

BRAHMS: What's strange about that?

YUBARI: Sergeant Ben'lat died six weeks ago at Valandria. His quarters are empty. (Pause) The Ermez parasite has a lot of high-level systems access. The computer allowed him to access the comm system in Ben'lat's quarters, instead of the brig intercom. That was how he hid his comm traffic.

ERMEZ: It also allowed me to access the engineering systems.

BRAHMS: Be quiet.

(Brahms again shocks Ermez who screams.)

SHARP: Mister Brahms!

YUBARI: No, it didn't. It couldn't, because the computer circuits in the brig are totally isolated from the rest of the ship's systems. Basic security precaution. (Pause) There's no virus. Just Ermez taunting you.

ERMEZ" She's lying!

BRAHMS: She's a good analyst.

ERMEZ: And she's betrayed you how many times? (Pause) She just wants you to stop torturing me. She'll do anything to stop that. There is a virus, Brahms, and I want you to be sitting here, staring at me, when you realize there's nothing you can do about it-
AGGGH!

(Brahms shocks him again as he finishes his last word, and Ermez saying "about it" degenerates into an agonized shout. Only this one doesn't stop; Brahms maintains the shock.)

SHARP: Brahms, stop it!

YUBARI: General! Trust me!

(Brahms lets it go a moment longer, then finally releases the shock.)

(Ermez takes a huge gulp of air, then wheezes in and out quickly, trying to catch his breath.)

BRAHMS: I believe you, Asuka.

(He shocks Ermez again, a quick one this time. Ermez screams again.)

SHARP: Then why don't you stop torturing him!

BRAHMS: Because I'm still going to kill him.

YUBARI: What?

SHARP: Of course he is.

(Brahms shocks Ermez again. Ermez screams then starts weeping in pain.)

YUBARI: General, no!

(Brahms stops the shock.)

BRAHMS: Asuka. This man – this thing has been pulling our strings from the beginning. He bombed the log recorder just to get you out here. Everything that's happened is something he chose.

YUBARI: And what do you gain from killing him?

BRAHMS: Justice. (Pause) And a certain... job satisfaction.

SHARP: We have a system for justice in the Federation. It involves charges, and juries, and – [due process!]

BRAHMS: Don't be naïve, Doctor. We're all going to be dead before this case goes to trial. And there is one monster we have to thank for that.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Ermez isn't the only monster I see in that cell, General.

BRAHMS: I've never denied that I am a monster.

YUBARI: But you never were!

BRAHMS: Maybe you missed it when I murdered nine thousand innocent people on New Victoria! Or launched a genocide against the Great Link! This is what I am, Asuka!

YUBARI: Right or wrong, you acted to save the Federation! And your sister!

BRAHMS: And here we are anyway, at the point of the Sword of Damocles. Everything I've done has brought me nothing but ashes and the end of all things!

YUBARI: But you did it all for a reason! What does torturing Ermez serve now except your bloodlust? When did you even develop a bloodlust, sir? That wasn't in the man who saved me from that hospital bed – who gave me a second chance!

(Pause.)

YUBARI: I was wrong, what I said earlier. Sometimes you do get to choose who you are... Mister Isaac Brahms.

(Pause.)

ERMEZ: (weakly) Listen to me, Brahms... the virus...

BRAHMS: There is no virus. (pause) Computer, lower the forcefield.

(The secure forcefield falls, and Sharp and Yubari walk into the cell, but hang back.)

BRAHMS: Just what did you hope to gain from all this, Ermez?

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: I would have killed you.

SHARP: I think that was the point: He told me earlier that he'd see me on the other side. I couldn't make out what he meant.

(Brahms shocks Ermez one more time, quickly. Ermez yelps then passes out just as Sharp comes running up.)

SHARP: What the hell, Brahms?!

(She crouches and pulls her tricorder again, scanning Ermez.)

BRAHMS: Just one more for the road, Doctor.

(Brahms depowers the EPS relay.)

YUBARI: He wasn't in any danger from us. We've kept him comfortable. Why would he want to die?

(Sharp closes up her tricorder.)

SHARP: I think you've always worked for the good guys so you've never learned how terrifying mercy can be. (Pause) I have to get him to sickbay. Thanks for that, Brahms. This is really the guy I wanted to save today. (She taps her combadge) Sharp to Transporter Room! Emergency beamout!

LORTH: *Yes, ma'am.*

YUBARI: Oh, and, Doctor.

SHARP: Yes... Lieutenant?

YUBARI: Our breakfast appointment. The one you missed yesterday.

(Tense pause.)

YUBARI: Can we reschedule for tomorrow?

SHARP: I'd like that... Asuka.

(The transporter beam picks up Sharp and Ermez and they're gone.)

BRAHMS: Wasn't she under the parasite's control yesterday morning?

YUBARI: Yes. But there were things she said... Doesn't matter. It's over now. (Pause)
Thank you, General.

BRAHMS: I should be thanking you, Asuka. How could you be so sure he was lying?

YUBARI: I wasn't, at first. But, while I was searching through his comm logs, looking for the virus, he sent another command through the brig circuits. It was a command to lower the strength of your cell's forcefield by eighty-five percent.

BRAHMS: No wonder it was so easy to break through.

YUBARI: All he wanted was for you to kill him.

BRAHMS: And I almost gave him what he wanted. (Pause.) That virus was our last chance, you know. The only way we could catch those ships now is if we had a sabotage team onboard ready to take out their engines.

(The intercom beeps.)

UNDERWOOD: *Paging Lieutenant Yubari.*

(Yubari taps her combadge.)

YUBARI: Yubari here, sir. We're done here.

UNDERWOOD: *Good. Then get up to the bridge. We just picked up a strange power buildup in the engines of both enemy ships. This could be it.*

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

UNDERWOOD: *Oh, and, Lieutenant – bring Mister Brahms with.*

SCENE 307-14**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(The ship rumbles as it flies through the ion storm.)

YUBARI: *Aye, sir! Yubari out.*

UNDERWOOD: Status of the threat vessels?

ROL: Engines still look like they're overloading, sir. Internal causes. Could be they weren't built to run this hard in an ion storm like this.

UNDERWOOD: If they drop speed for just thirty seconds, we'll catch them. Bridge to Dovan. We're barely three minutes from the Gevinon system, sir. You'd better get up here.

DOVAN: *Dovan here. That's a negative, Commander.*

UNDERWOOD: Dovan — [you need to be up here!]

DOVAN: *I'm not just moping, Underwood, I'm on to something. Something big. Maybe the key to this whole thing. Every second counts.*

UNDERWOOD: But, Dovan — [we could be going into combat!]

DOVAN: *I trust you, Underwood. You'll get these people out of here alive. And if you don't... well, that's where I come in. Understood? (Pause.) I asked if I made myself clear, Commander!*

UNDERWOOD: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: *Me, out.*

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Alright, you heard the captain. Red alert! All hands to battlestations!

(Red alert klaxons.)

(Yubari and Brahms enter from a turbolift.)

YUBARI: (to Beta-shift tactical officer) You're relieved, Ensign.

ROL: Shields are up. All decks report ready.

YUBARI: Weapons charged, torpedo crews on deck. I have six quantum torpedoes ready to fire.

UNDERWOOD: Good. Hail the *Renegade*.

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

(She presses some buttons, a hail goes out.)

UNDERWOOD: General, I was thinking we'd take the one on the left, and your men can take the one on the right?

BRAHMS: Agreed.

YUBARI: I have them.

UNDERWOOD AND BRAHMS: (simultaneous) On screen.

(The screen activates.)

BRAHMS: Gentlemen. If the bluegill engines overload, we'll have a very short window of opportunity.

OPERATIONS: *Noted, sir. We will engage the starboard target, if the Excelsior will attack the other. Once we enter torpedo range, targets will have only seconds to live.*

BRAHMS: Tactical, have they managed to get a message through to their base yet?

TACTICAL: *No, sir. The storm has imposed total whiteout conditions. Effective communications range is less than a billion kilometers.*

OPERATIONS: *However, the targets may reach the Gevinon heliopause just as their engines fail.*

ROL: We agree. The heliopause is acting as a sort of windbreak against the ion storm, so their transceivers would clear up enough to send a message. We'd have less than ten seconds to stop them.

BRAHMS: Can we do it? Maybe pull them into that gas cloud and let their engine leak ignite it?

TACTICAL: *The gas cloud is too far inside the system. But we might be able to force them down into the outermost fluidic giant.*

BRAHMS: Let's hope it doesn't come to that. We'll stop them before they reach the heliopause. Have you figured out what was bothering you about this ion storm?

TACTICAL: *No, sir. I'm sorry, sir.*

BRAHMS: Don't worry. You'll get it when you need to.

TACTICAL: *Thank you, sir.*

BRAHMS: Good luck, gentlemen. I wish I were there.

OPERATIONS: *Noted. We will not disappoint you.*

BRAHMS: You never do. Brahms out.

(Viewscreen blanks out.)

YUBARI: What's taking those engines so long? They should have overloaded by now.

ROL: They seem to have hit some kind of plateau.

UNDERWOOD: In that case, fingers crossed that they can't maintain it.

SCENE 307-15**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM**

THE MAJOR: Sir, what's wrong?

LORHROK: Their interlink transcievers aren't designed to handle N-bit command inputs!

THE MAJOR: Pardon, sir?

SIMON: It means our engine sabotage is going nowhere fast.

NEEVA: Sir, their security nearly has a fix on us.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am, that hardly matters right now. We're almost to the border!

NEEVA: Major, if they trace the sabotage back to us, then all they have to do is open that hatch and two million metric tonnes of water comes down on our heads. Then it won't matter if they're ten seconds from the border or ten days, because we won't be overloading those engines on any timeframe.

SIMON: Boss, did you try rerouting the dorsal gyro capillaries?

LORHROK: I'd love to, but I haven't the first idea which one of these glyphs represents the gyro capillaries.

SIMON: Why, it's this one!

(He presses an alien button, and the whine suddenly starts rising again.)

LORHROK: Simon Westlake, you're a genius.

SIMON: First time anyone's ever called me that.

(The whine continues rising, building to an overload.)

**NEEVA: Got it! Ion feedback is going off the scale! Terminal engine overheat in four!
Three! Two! One!**

SCENE 307-16**LOCATION: SPACE**

(On both bluegills ships, the engines overload with a shriek and maybe the scream of metal. At the same time, they drop out of warp.)

SCENE 307-17**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

YUBARI: Engine shutdown! Engine shutdown! Enemy vessels are dropping out of warp.

ROL: Less than three billion clicks from the edge of whiteout conditions.

BRAHMS: Well, there's a deus ex machina if I've ever heard one.

UNDERWOOD: Hold us at warp until we are right on top of them. This needs to be the fastest space battle ever fought, or we lose.

ROL: Aye, sir. Dropping to impulse in two, one, mark.

(The *Excelsior* drops out of warp.)

YUBARI: They're trying to evade on thrusters.

UNDERWOOD: Don't let them! Open fire!

(All six quantum torpedoes fire, hit, and tear huge holes in the enemy vessel.)

YUBARI: Direct hits on all critical systems! They're going to breach!

UNDERWOOD: Pull us away!

ROL: Aye, sir!

(The Gevinon cruiser explodes. No shockwave reaches the *Excelsior*.)

UNDERWOOD: The other target?

YUBARI: Behind us, retreating on thrusters.

BRAHMS: Where's the *Renegade*?

YUBARI: Almost caught up. They'll intercept momentarily.

SCENE 307-18**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM**

(We hear the Gevinon ship explode)

NEEVA: One parasite vessel has been destroyed.

NEEVA: (simultaneous) That's what
I'm talkin' about

LORHROK: (simultaneous) Brilliant!

SIMON: (simultaneous) Whooh!

THE MAJOR: (simultaneous) Yes! Ha ha!

THE MAJOR: That means we're next, sirs.

NEEVA: Any second now. Any chance of getting a message out to the *Excelsior*?

SIMON: We're using their entire subspace transceiver to excite the overload. So... no.

LORHROK: I want you all to know I wish I'd had more time to become your friend. It's been a pleasure serving with each of you.

THE MAJOR: And an honor. This is a good death. Thank you, sirs.

(An small alien console alert is going off... and off, and off, like an alarm.)

SIMON: Oh, no.

LORHROK: What? Did they trace us?

NEEVA: Worse.

SIMON: Boss, they just pulled the transceiver offline.

THE MAJOR: So?

LORHROK: The transceiver was the only thing holding this plan together. No transceiver, no sabotage. No sabotage, no engine failure. No engine failure...

(As he trails off, the ship's power systems come quickly back to life.)

SCENE 307-19**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The bluegill ship jumps back to warp.)

SCENE 307-20**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(Console alarms everywhere!)

YUBARI: Target lost!

UNDERWOOD: Reacquire!

YUBARI: I can't! He's off my board!

ROL: Sir, I think they jumped to warp!

BRAHMS: They can't possibly have engine power back.

ROL: I'm setting a pursuit course.

UNDERWOOD: Agreed.

ROL: This will take us inside the Gevinon heliopause.

BRAHMS: We have no choice.

UNDERWOOD: Do it.

(The *Excelsior* leaps to warp in hot pursuit.)

BRAHMS: Signal the *Renegade* to follow us in.

YUBARI: Already am.

(The *Excelsior* begins a slow deceleration, trembling as it does so.)

ROL: Passing through the heliopause now!

YUBARI: Whiteout conditions have cleared. Intrasystem commlines are available.

UNDERWOOD: Target status!

YUBARI: The *Renegade* has already reacquired. They are closing fast. (Pause) They're good.

BRAHMS: They're mine. They're the best.

ROL: Target's leaving in a big hurry. Look at him, he's heading for that... it looks like a space station?

YUBARI: That's no space station; it's a small moon.

UNDERWOOD: Cut him off. Drive him into the surface. Use warp power if you have to.

ROL: Inside a star system?

UNDERWOOD: Just don't hit a gravity well and nothing bad will happen.

(The *Excelsior* lunges forward at relativistic speeds.)

YUBARI: I thought we only had ten seconds.

ROL: They're trying to escape on impulse engines at point-nine light speed.

BRAHMS: Time dilation?

ROL: Precisely. But it won't last long. We have about seven seconds.

YUBARI: They're changing course. Veering toward the planet!

ROL: Four.

UNDERWOOD: Straight into the *Renegade's* crosshairs.

YUBARI: *Renegade* weapons charged!

ROL: Two. One.

YUBARI: *Renegade* firing!

(Sensor alert at Rol's station.)

ROL: They've sent out a distress call.

UNDERWOOD: What?

BRAHMS: We didn't make it.

ROL: They've... they've successfully alerted the garrison on Gevinon.

YUBARI: Picking up new contacts!

ROL: So Eden sank to grief.

UNDERWOOD: Identify, Yubari.

YUBARI: Mostly the same engine signature as this one. They must be part of the garrison. Various configurations and weights.

UNDERWOOD: How many?

YUBARI: About... two hundred, sir.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Retreat.

BRAHMS: Is that wise?

UNDERWOOD: Someone has to warn the Federation.

YUBARI: We can't. Those dreadnoughts can outrun us.

UNDERWOOD: Then, Mister Rol, I need a place to hide. I think someone mentioned a gas cloud?

BRAHMS: The gas cloud would hide us, for days if we needed. But we'd be surrounded, with no sensors or shields. And it's on the far side of that armada.

UNDERWOOD: I don't see we have a choice. Miz Yubari, deploy fighters. They're to launch countermeasures and screen incoming torpedoes. They are not to break formation for any reason.

(Rol stands.)

UNDERWOOD: Mister Rol, man your station.

ROL: I'm in command of that squadron.

UNDERWOOD: You're also the only pilot on the bridge, and there's two hundred ships between us and that gas cloud. Your orders are to run — as fast as you can.

ROL: Yes, sir.

SCENE 307-21**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM**

(Smoke, an alien aquatic alert klaxon on the other side of the bulkhead.)

LORHROK: (coughing heavily) Is everyone alright?

SIMON: (coughing) Yeah, boss.

NEEVA: (coughing) Same. And, I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but being alive isn't good news right now.

THE MAJOR: We were definitely hit by a photon torpedo. The *Excelsior* must have fired on us. But why didn't they finish the job?

LORHROK: Neeva, get on comms. Find out what happened.

SCENE 307-22**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

UNDERWOOD: Helm, keep us on the outside of that formation. We'd rather have one shield fail facing two hundred ships than every shield fail facing thirty apiece.

ROL: I'll do my best, sir.

UNDERWOOD: And keep those weapons tight, Lieutenant. Line them up before you fire.

YUBARI: There's too many of them!

UNDERWOOD: All the more reason to make sure our shots count. How's the *Renegade*?

BRAHMS: About the same. She's faster but not as well-shielded.

UNDERWOOD: Can she cloak?

BRAHMS: And leave you without an escort? Operations wouldn't dream of it. Besides, they'd be torn apart when the shields dropped.

(Sensor alert for Rol.)

ROL: Isaac, find out what that alert is. I'm flying.

(Brahms steps over to a nearby console.)

BRAHMS: More contacts. They were hiding behind the fifth planet, waiting for the main force to hem us in.

UNDERWOOD: Wow many?

BRAHMS: Ninety-four.

UNDERWOOD: Dammit. (Pause) They have us. (Pause) Rol, can we jump to warp, get out of here before the two fleets close the fist on us?

ROL: No, sir. We're in the planet's gravity well. Without precalculation, we'd blow a hole in space-time.

YUBARI: We have about eighty seconds. Once they have us surrounded, we won't last long.

UNDERWOOD: No-win situations are for other starships. There is a way out of this... But I can't see it. Mister Brahms?

BRAHMS: You're right. There is a way out... but I'd prefer to keep it as a last resort.

UNDERWOOD: We need a last resort.

BRAHMS: I'll make that decision.

UNDERWOOD: We're out of ideas.

BRAHMS: But not out of time. Please, j[ust try to find another option.]

(Sensor alert at Yubari's console.)

YUBARI: Sir, the *Renegade* is changing course.

BRAHMS: No!

UNDERWOOD: Why?

YUBARI: She's coming about to two-one-two mark ten... engaging the second group of bandits, sir.

BRAHMS: Hail them! Quickly!

(Another sensor alert for Yubari.)

YUBARI: They've intercepted... and are now in combat with all ninety-four ships.

BRAHMS: Hail them. Please.

YUBARI: I can't. Their comms just went offline.

UNDERWOOD: Helm, adjust course to support — [the *Renegade's* attack.]

BRAHMS: No. (Pause) Don't you see? They're buying you time.

UNDERWOOD: Against ninety-four ships?

ROL: They'll hold for as long as it takes. They're Isaac Brahms's troops.

BRAHMS: Don't let them go to waste.

(Pause.)

UNDERWOOD: Helm, maintain course for the gas cloud. Best speed.

SCENE 307-23**LOCATION: RENEGADE BRIDGE**

(Under heavy fire, fires on the bridge, on the verge of destruction.)

OPERATIONS: Helm, alter to course three-one-two. Target fast vessels, all classes and configurations.

(A console explodes. A man screams as he catches fire.)

OPERATIONS: First aid, extinguish that man.

(The man is extinguished)

OPERATIONS: Tactical.

(Pause.)

OPERATIONS: Tactical!

(Tactical is typing away quickly at his console.)

OPERATIONS: Combat report, Tactical! Where are your firing solutions!

TACTICAL: Not now, Operations! I remembered!

COMPUTER: *Warning: weapons offline.*

OPERATIONS: What are you talking about, Tactical?

TACTICAL: The ion storm! I know where I've seen it before! It's the Cartier study, Operations! The bioelectric profiles from the Cartier study!

OPERATIONS: Noted, but dismissed! We're in combat!

TACTICAL: And we're going to be dead in a few seconds! It's now or never!

COMPUTER: *Warning: antimatter containment compromised.*

(Pause.)

OPERATIONS: Proceed!

TACTICAL: Do we have communications?

OPERATIONS: Negative!

TACTICAL: Then we have to tell the General some other way!

(Tactical loads some more data, as some alerts hit his console.)

COMPUTER: *Warning: core breach in progress.*

(A new klaxon goes off.)

OPERATIONS: All hands, abandon ship! Repeat: [all hands abandon ship!]

TACTICAL: Operations! Call up lot... (checking his console) pee-enn-four-two-eight!

OPERATIONS: What?

TACTICAL: Get it from storage and prepare for immediate transport!

OPERATIONS: Noted!

(He taps a couple keys on his console.)

OPERATIONS: Abandon ship! Abandon ship!

COMPUTER: *Warning: Core breach imminent.*

(Operations has finished hitting keys.)

OPERATIONS: Tactical: proceed!

TACTICAL: Aye, sir. And, Jim! (Pause) It's been an honor.

OPERATIONS: Old friend... duly noted!

(An explosion begins.)

LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

(Sensor alert at Yubari's console.)

YUBARI: Sirs. The *Renegade* has been destroyed.

BRAHMS: My friends. (Pause) That will do. That will do.

UNDERWOOD: Any survivors? Escape pods?

YUBARI: Only two pods were launched — both consumed by the shockwave.

UNDERWOOD: What about transporter signals?

BRAHMS: They never lost their shields. And even if the bluegills beamed anyone out, it would only be to infest them. My crew is dead, Commander.

YUBARI: Actually, sir, I am receiving a transporter signal.

UNDERWOOD: At this range?

YUBARI: Non-biological. Just a few cubic centimeters. But it is from the *Renegade*.

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: Commander, if my crew [spent their last moments sending us this, then it's imperative that we find out what it is.]

UNDERWOOD: Materialize it, Lieutenant. But have transporter room inspect it carefully in the pattern buffer first.

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

(She sends the appropriate commands.)

ROL: Sir, we're entering the gas cloud. It's interfering with sensors and shields, as expected.

UNDERWOOD: Good. Any sign of pursuit?

ROL: No, sir. All three hundred ships seem perfectly happy to surround the cloud and wait for us to come out.

BRAHMS: They don't want to damage healthy hosts if they can help it.

UNDERWOOD: Even better. Switch to silent running mode, Mister Rol, then set a random heading deeper into the cloud. That'll buy us some time, at least.

(Red alert switches off and most of the bridge systems power down.)

YUBARI: Sir, Transporter Room has cleared the object for transport — but it's been damaged. The *Renegade* must have beamed it out at the very last moment.

UNDERWOOD: Understood.

YUBARI: Materializing now.

(A transporter beam materializes a small object onto the bridge.)

YUBARI: What in the world is that?

ROL: I think I've seen it before.

(Underwood steps forward and stoops to pick it up. It is beeping quietly.)

BRAHMS: You have. It's one of the artifacts we catalogued on Pnakos.

UNDERWOOD: This isn't just some artifact.

BRAHMS: I'm surprised you recognize it.

UNDERWOOD: Heh. Recognize it? I've had dreams about this technology. This is the biggest scientific find in... how long did you say you've had this?

BRAHMS: Eighteen years.

UNDERWOOD: To think. I spent months on the *California* at the edges of known space chasing a hint that one of these existed... and there was a working unit already gathering dust in some Intelligence bin on Earth.

ROL: Commander, what are you talking about? You never knew about Pnakos until yesterday.

UNDERWOOD: Don't you get it, Lieutenant? I don't know how it got to Pnakos, but this ansible was built by the Scions of the Stars.

BRAHMS: That's not the important thing. Look: see that flashing light on the bottom? The power running through it? It's never done that before.

YUBARI: What does it mean?

UNDERWOOD: It means there's an active signal nearby.

YUBARI: Directed at us?

BRAHMS: I doubt it. We're probably just close enough to the other two transmitters that we're picking up some of the backwash. The ansible's too damaged for us to be certain; the message is unrecoverable.

UNDERWOOD: But I think the message your crew sent is unmistakable:

BRAHMS: The Scions are here.

SCENE 307-24**LOCATION: GEVINON CRUISER – DRY ROOM**

(Turbulence strikes the ship for a moment.)

LORHROK: What was that?

SIMON: We've hit atmo, sir. We're descending to the surface of Gevinon Prime.

LORHROK: Do we know what happened to the *Excelsior*?

NEEVA: Our comm system is nearly offline, sir. I can't pick it out of the traffic. I know they were ambushed. Hundreds of ships. The garrison has been alerted.

SIMON: Hundreds of ships against just one...

LORHROK: I'm not giving up on them without proof, Major. Keep trying, Neeva. Major, what do we know about this planet?

THE MAJOR: Not much. It's a garrison world, and we know that includes mostly troops who aren't aquatic lifeforms. We believe there's a series of linked underwater habitat bubbles where the "landwalkers" like us maintain the military outpost with close ties to the surrounding aquatic environment.

SIMON: So this ship is going under water?

THE MAJOR: That's one reason they're so small – so they can handle both space travel and water pressure inside a gravity field.

SIMON: What's our mission, then?

LORHROK: I don't know, Simon. It seems like we've already lost.

THE MAJOR: Sir, we're not going to surrender.

LORHROK: Never.

NEEVA: I've got something! ...alien starship...

SIMON: That must be the *Excelsior*.

NEEVA: Federation starship.

LORHROK: The *Excelsior* is the only one within a month of here. The next closest must be the *Renegade*, and we left them to the pirates two weeks ago. What are they saying?

(Pause.)

NEEVA: I need to verify this.

LORHROK: What is it, Commander?

NEEVA: The Federation ship... has been destroyed.

LORHROK: Maker.

SIMON: Then... we're stranded out here. Alone.

LORHROK: I'm not going to let us die out here, Simon. (Pause) That's a promise.
(Pause) Get ready for landfall. Put on your best bluegill faces. We're going to have to blend in.

SCENE 307-25

LOCATION: *EXCELSIOR* CREW QUARTERS

(Brahms is playing Dreilide Thrace Sonata No. 1 at a piano in his quarters.)

(The door opens without any warning. Dovan walks in.)

DOVAN: Brahms.

(Brahms stops playing and tries to compose himself.)

BRAHMS: (snuffle snuffle) Mr. Dovan. (snuffle)

DOVAN: I'm sorry, have you been...?

BRAHMS: (snuffle) Just... (snuffle) not used to the humidity on this ship.

DOVAN: I'll have engineering look into it. (Pause) I didn't know you played.

BRAHMS: I used to. Every day. But that was... twenty years ago now. (reflective Pause) We went into battle and you weren't at your post.

DOVAN: No, I wasn't.

BRAHMS: Then, in case you haven't heard, allow me the privilege of getting you up to date: the *Renegade's* been lost with all hands. The whole Gevinon system knows we're here, knows we know about the Sword. As soon as the ion storm passes and its safe to travel again, the whole bluegill fleet will know about it. The Federation is a few weeks from total annihilation, and we're trapped in a gas cloud surrounded by three hundred ships. (Pause) Where the hell were you, Dovan?

DOVAN: I finally know why we're here. And I know what we have to do. (Pause) It was the scans, Brahms.

BRAHMS: What?

DOVAN: That's why we're Captain Cortez sent us out here. She saw it all in the scans.

BRAHMS: What scans?

DOVAN: The high-resolution maps Yubari made five weeks ago.

BRAHMS: I've seen those scans. I only had a few moments to spare while we tried to stop you from destroying the galaxy, but even from that, I'm certain: there was no sign that the bluegills or the Borg had traced the *Anbar* incident back to the Federation. The scans were clean.

DOVAN: You're half-right. There was something else — a detail only Captain Cortez could have noticed, after a long night of study. Something so terrible she couldn't risk a log entry about it — not even a note to herself in the margins. But I'm certain this is it.

(He drops a padd on the piano.)

DOVAN: It's those space stations.

(Brahms picks it up and starts clicking through.)

BRAHMS: What about them?

DOVAN: Look closely. Look how they're constructed. Look who built them.

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: That's impossible.

DOVAN: Should be. Isn't.

BRAHMS: Then the Sword [was already falling?]

DOVAN: Was already falling. (Pause) That's why she sent us out here. That's her mission for me – for us: we have to stop it.

BRAHMS: How? We're surrounded by three hundred ships. Every bluegill on Gevinon knows we're here by now, and there are no 'civilians' stationed on a bluegill garrison world. We'd have to kill every single living organism in this star system!

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Go on.

BRAHMS: (sarcastic) Well, once we were finished sterilizing the planet, we'd have to destroy every one of the three hundred ships out there – alone. Oh, and we'd have to wipe all their computer records of any hint we were ever here, and make it look like somebody else did it. And we'd have to get all that finished before this ion storm clears up and they're able to get a message through to their main fleet.

DOVAN: Granted. (Pause) Now, how are we going to do that?