

Starship Excelsior

"The Mapstone"

(Season 4, Episode E)

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

SCENE 4E-00 (RECAP)**LOCATION: EMPTINESS****NARRATOR: Previously on *Star Trek: Excelsior*.****LOCATION: SS TAWNY ANNE (FROM 4G-02)****PARKER: Three weeks ago, the neural parasites we call "the bluegills" began to infiltrate Starbase Nine-One-One.****UNDERWOOD: But we defeated the bluegills! On the *Excelsior*, at Gevinon Prime!****PARKER: No.****LOCATION: READY ROOM (FROM 404-24)****DOVAN: Neeva's been analyzing the Iconian ruin in this star system. Someone else searched the ruin, recently, just like all the others.****LOCATION: SS TAWNY ANNE (FROM 4G-02)****PARKER: They sweep into a system, scour any Iconian ruins they find, and then disappear... The bluegills are looking for something, desperately, in the ruins of an ancient civilization.**

LOCATION: READY ROOM (FROM 404-24)

DOVAN: Just tell me this: are we looking for the same thing they are?

PARKER: Yes, we are.

DOVAN: And do we know what that is?

LOCATION: ICONIAN RUINS – CAVES (FROM 4G-04)

COX: They're looking for Avalon.

PARKER: What is "Avalon"?

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

LOCATION: ICONIAN RUINS - CAVES - UNION III (FROM 4G-03)

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.

LOCATION: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO – NIGHT - PLAZA (YUBARI'S MEMORY) (FROM 405-19)

BRAHMS: Avalon can never be found, except by she who holds the Mapstone.

LOCATION: BRAHMS’S GARDEN (FROM 405-21)

YUBARI: The what?

BRAHMS: An artifact. If you need to find Avalon, then you need to find the Mapstone.

YUBARI: I don’t suppose you have a copy.

BRAHMS: I believe you may find it near the edge of the Jathlin Arm.

LOCATION: ICONIAN RUINS - CAVES - UNION III (FROM 4G-03)

PARKER: Seven stars point to three... find the second, we will meet. [snip] What does it mean?

UNDERWOOD: The Iconians enjoyed riddles.

LOCATION: DELTA LOUNGE (FROM 405-23)

ROL: The Jathlin Arm, he said?

YUBARI: Yeah. Near the edge.

ROL: I wonder whether we'll find more than just a Mapstone out there.

NARRATOR: *And now, the continuation...*

SCENE 4E-01**LOCATION: SPACE***(Excelsior flyby.)*

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, Stardate Six-zero-six-five-nine-point-nine, classify entry sigma-six, voiceprint authentication. The Excelsior has been in the Jathlin Arm for over a week. So far, we've had no sign of the Mapstone, or Avalon, Iconian ruins, or really anything at all. I'm... just a teensy bit bored.*

LOCATION: READY ROOM*(Door chimes.)***DOVAN:** Come.*(Door hisses open; J'naya steps in.)***DOVAN:** Ah, Miss J'naya. Come in.**J'NAYA:** Captain. Permission to speak freely, sir?**DOVAN:** Really? For what purpose?**J'NAYA:** I have concerns about my working conditions as a department head.**DOVAN:** Well... um... Go ahead, then. Permission granted.**J'NAYA:** Captain, what the hell are we doing here?

DOVAN: In the Ready Room? These are my office hours. Did I not post the bulletin?

J'NAYA: No, out here sir. In the Jathlin Arm. Three weeks we've been wandering around out here like a bunch of schoolchildren on bank holiday. It's like we're looking for something, but we haven't the faintest idea what it is or where to find it. Except I have the feeling that everyone on this ship knows what it is but me.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Commander, I'll make you a deal.

J'NAYA: I accept.

DOVAN: I haven't told you the terms yet.

J'NAYA: I was showing initiative, sir.

DOVAN: Ah, carry on, then. I will tell you the answer to your question... after you finally get down to sickbay for your annual physical.

J'NAYA: What? I had my physical three months ago.

DOVAN: You were scheduled, but you must not have shown up: sickbay doesn't have a record of an exam.

J'NAYA: That's absurd. Doctor Maiek and Nurse Hennessy [had me pumping sensor blocks for hours.]

DOVAN: All I'm telling you is what Sickbay's telling me. If you were there, then they lost the records. Either way, we need your physical. Get down there, pronto.

J'NAYA: I go on duty in fifteen minutes. Nacelle inspection in two hours.

DOVAN: Adow will hold the fort for you. Health comes first!

J'NAYA: And then you'll tell me?

DOVAN: And then I'll tell you. Now, go. You already took the deal. Dismissed.

J'NAYA: Aye, sir.

(She exits. Dovan hits his combadge.)

DOVAN: Dovan to Sickbay.

SHARP: *Sickbay here, Alcar.*

DOVAN: I need you to drop everything for Commander J'naya's annual physical. I just sent her down to you.

SHARP: *What? Kestra had her physical three months ago.*

DOVAN: I'm afraid the files have been lost.

SHARP: *I was just re-reading them this morning! How did we lose them?*

DOVAN: I deleted them.

SHARP: *When?*

DOVAN: About thirty seconds from now.

SHARP: *Oh, this isn't a physical. This is an excuse for me to give Kestra a bluegill screening.*

DOVAN: Make it thorough, Doctor. And, Melissa – I feel a lot better about things since our talk yesterday.

SHARP: *I never even saw you yesterday, Alcar. But nice try. If I'd been a bluegill, you would have had me there. Remind me the name of your favorite brother?*

DOVAN: Aden. He's alphabetically closest. And he hates being the answer to all my security questions. How's that?

SHARP: *You pass. I'll have my report on Kestra as soon as I can. Sickbay out.*

DOVAN: Computer. (computer beeps) Delete medical files for Commander Kestra J'naya, physical examination, stardate six-oh-four-four-one-point-eight.

(The computer does this and boops.)

(Dovan begins walking.)

COMPUTER: *Files deleted.*

DOVAN: Thank you, computer.

COMPUTER: *You are welcome.*

(Doors open.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

(Dovan heads for his seat in the center.)

NEEVA: Captain on the bridge!

DOVAN: As you were. Helm, status report.

REEVES: Holding steady at warp six, captain. On schedule for survey of this stellar group.

DOVAN: Thank you, Lieutenant...?

REEVES: Reeves, sir.

DOVAN: Aren't you a little old to be a lieutenant, Mister Reeves?

REEVES: Just living the dream, sir.

DOVAN: Aren't we all, Mister Reeves. Carry on.

REEVES: Aye aye, captain.

DOVAN: Another exciting day in the Jathlin Arm then, Commander?

NEEVA: Depends where you look for excitement, sir.

DOVAN: People keep saying that to me. It's uncanny. Is there some kind of secret party happening aboard? My birthday was six months ago, in case there's any risk of that.

(Sensor alert.)

NEEVA: Captain, I'm picking up a signal. Very faint. It just showed up at the edge of our sensor range.

DOVAN: More of those spam probes we ran into last week? That was enough informercials for one mission.

NEEVA: I don't think so, sir. It's registering as... as a distress call!

DOVAN: Could just be a trick to lure us in to the spambots.

NEEVA: Sir, regulations [clearly requires us to investigate a case like this.]

DOVAN: I know, I know, we have to investigate. Lay in a course, helm.

REEVES: Aye, sir. Course laid in.

DOVAN: All ahead full. Or, in other words... hit it.

REEVES: "Hit it," aye sir.

(Helm presses a button, the *Excelsior* goes under acceleration, and scene.)

THEME SONG – SCENE 99

DOVAN: *Starship: Excelsior.*

NARRATOR: *A Star Trek Fan Production (pause) Tonight's episode (pause) The Mapstone.*

SCENE 4E-02**LOCATION: PHASER RANGE**

(Sharp and Yubari are practicing.)

SHARP: That's a point for Melissa Sharp.

YUBARI: Two points Yubari. And, game.

COMPUTER: *Match over. Yubari wins.*

YUBARI: Again.

SHARP: Asuka, I'm not sure [that I want to be humiliated again quite so soon.]

YUBARI: You're improving, Melissa. I think you're ready for level three.

SHARP: Really? (pause) Well, in that case...

YUBARI: Computer, reset phaser range and increase difficulty to level three.

COMPUTER: *Level three. Begin.*

(They start firing.)

SHARP: Alec is running another shindig tonight. Delta Lounge this time.

YUBARI: I know, I got my invite.

SHARP: You coming?

YUBARI: I don't think so. Last time everyone spent the last hour just curled up by a holodeck fireplace sipping hot cocoa.

SHARP: Right. That's why it's the most popular party on the ship.

YUBARI: The captain's put my command training on hold for the next few days, so I thought I'd see if the Marines can teach me something. They're running a late-shift training tonight on sub-orbital personnel insertions.

SHARP: "Sub-orbital personnel insertion"?

YUBARI: Jumping out of an orbiting starship wearing an EV suit, surviving atmospheric re-entry, and landing safely within a target zone on the surface. Easier than it sounds; the tricky part is when you're in free fall and under fire.

SHARP: Do they have hot cocoa?

YUBARI: It wasn't on the syllabus, but I can put in a request. Why? Are you coming? We'll have a lot of fun.

SHARP: We've been here chatting for half an hour, and that's what gets you to crack a smile? Atmospheric re-entry? I guess that's good to know.

COMPUTER: Match over. Yubari wins.

YUBARI: Again?

SHARP: Okay, but, on one condition: I want you to tell one of your stories.

YUBARI My what?

SHARP: C'mon, Asuka. Everyone on the bridge knows you have the best stories. But I'm stuck down in sickbay trying to get chuckles out of Nurse Mike while you're keeping Neeva and Rol in stitches. I want a story. That's my price.

(Pause.)

YUBARI: Suit yourself. Computer, reset range and begin.

(Pause.)

SHARP: Well?

YUBARI: Thinking. (pause) Alright, some people laugh at this one. It was on my second Academy training cruise. You've heard the one where my roommate and I got pulled thirty-eight minutes back in time, right?

SHARP: Kestra was just telling me about it at her physical today. Hilarious. How much of that really happened?

YUBARI: What do you mean? All of it.

SHARP: Even the part with the duck?

YUBARI: Especially the part with the duck. Okay, so this story starts right after that. Or... right before it, I guess. Hm. We were [running back to the airponics bay when this Klingon decloaks.]

(The yellow alert "klaxon" sounds.)

NEEVA: *Yellow alert. All hands, yellow alert. Lieutenant Yubari to the bridge. We are approaching the source of the distress call.*

(Yubari hits her combadge.)

YUBARI: I'm on my way.

SHARP: I'd better get to sickbay.

(They both exit.)

SCENE 4E-03**LOCATION: BRIDGE**

NEEVA: Approaching coordinates.

(Yubari exits the turbolift.)

DOVAN: Is it a spambot?

YUBARI: No, a ship. I read fifty thousand metric tons, crew complement two hundred. Engines non-functional; they're adrift, sir.

NEEVA: Probably a scout ship or small freighter, captain. Looks like they overloaded their chambers coil. Burnt out the engines and took down communications, except for the automated beacon.

DOVAN: So we can't hail them?

LORHROK: At this range, we could access their transceiver directly. But we'd have to calculate the carrier wave modulation precisely.

NEEVA: Way ahead of you, Alec. Halfway modulated.

DOVAN: Armaments?

YUBARI: Um... none, sir.

DOVAN: Nothing? Not even a point-defense laser?

YUBARI: I'm also reading primitive lightspeed engines, and the cargo bays are full of preserved foodstuffs. Which means —

LORHROK: They brought their own food with them. No replicators.

DOVAN: Not a very advanced species, then.

YUBARI: Computer estimate places them on par with Earth's late twenty-first century.

NEEVA: I've got the modulation. Transmitting friendly greeting in all known languages and linguacode.

YUBARI: They're responding.

DOVAN: On screen.

(Channel open.)

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *I scarce believe my eyes. Is that a spaceship or a Dreadnought of the Titans?*

DOVAN: This is Captain Alcar Dovan of the U.S.S. *Excelsior*, representing the United Federation of Planets.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *This is Lord Harth, shipmaster in the Dronegar Protectorate. We believed all other sapient life in this region was extinct.*

DOVAN: We aren't from around here. It looks like you have a bad chambers coil, Lord Harth. Can we help?

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *How did you know that?*

DOVAN: We scanned your ship. We meant no offense.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *Oh, no, by all means, Captain Alcar Dovan, if your scanners are powerful enough to diagnose a chambers coil at that distance, we welcome any help you can provide.*

DOVAN: Excellent. We'll beam over an engineering team to assist you.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *"Beam," captain? What is this word?*

DOVAN: It's a... you know? Easier to show you. We'll meet you in your main cargo hold. The Federation looks forward to getting to know the Dronegar Protectorate better, Lord Harth.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *We await your officers in the main cargo hold, Captain, with gratitude. Out.*

(Channel closes.)

DOVAN: Hm.

LORHROK: Captain, would you mind if I led the Engineering Team? I know it's properly Commander J'naya's department, but...

DOVAN: I was thinking the same thing, Lieutenant. We don't just need an engineer over there; this is first contact. We need an ambassador. Find out what you can about the Dronegar.

LORHROK: Seem harmless enough.

DOVAN: Yes. Just like humans, except for the bumpy foreheads. Almost... generic. Well, take Yubari and a security detail with you. Along with your pick of engineers.

LORHROK: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: Dismissed.

(Rol enters the bridge just as Lorhrok and Yubari head for the exits.)

ROL: Permission to join you, Captain?

LORHROK: Oh, hey, Bev.

DOVAN: Granted, but you're not on duty for another —

(Rol crosses to Dovan's ready room and enters.)

DOVAN: Did he just barge into my ready room?

NEEVA: I guess he wanted to join you in private, sir.

DOVAN: Did he say that?

NEEVA: He looks worried.

DOVAN: No — that was his “wheels within wheels within wheels” face. (sigh) The last time he got that face, we spent a week infiltrating those smugglers on the edge of the Star Desert.

NEEVA: Which ended in us bringing down the ring, signing a treaty with the Tilmari, and finding the ruins on Raechoren Five.

DOVAN: I'm not saying Rol doesn't get results! But his methodology... let's just say it makes my reports to Admiral Parker the wrong kind of interesting. You have the bridge, Commander.

(Dovan exits.)

SCENE 4E-04**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(Kestra is running down the corridor.)

J'NAYA: (still breathing heavily) Neeva! (a few deep breaths to catch her breath) I'm so sorry I'm late. I was in (more heavy breathing) sickbay.

NEEVA: It's fine. No harm done. Right?

J'NAYA: I didn't slip off a ladder in Engineering again, if that's what you're wondering.

NEEVA: Well, I try not to assume. But... guilty as charged.

J'NAYA: For once, I wasn't the one being clumsy. Doctor Sharp – er, Doctor Melissa – er, Melissa – had me doing a full physical exam.

NEEVA: Didn't you already have your annual?

J'NAYA: I thought so! They lost the records. She redid the whole exam herself, wouldn't let me out of it until she'd run an extra brain scan.

NEEVA: Oh. (pause) Well – you know how it can be. System don't update, a file goes to the wrong place. Melissa is very invested in making sure... everything checks out. In terms of the crew. The crew's health, anyway. (nervous chuckle)

J'NAYA: Well, I'm just glad it's out of the way and we can get started on this nacelle inspection. Thank you so much for taking the time.

NEEVA: Kestra, it's my pleasure.

J'NAYA: No, it's not, it's a lot of tedious nitpicking in the back end of the ship, and you could have just as easily blown me off and made me take Adow or Meyers instead.

NEEVA: Joint inspections never work when one of the inspectors is subordinate to the other.

J'NAYA: Which is why I asked you. And you've gone out of your way to say "yes" to everything I ask you for.

NEEVA: Some would say the Chief of Operations' job is to go out of her way to say "yes."

J'NAYA: You're really not going to accept this compliment, are you?

NEEVA: Not without a fight!

J'NAYA: Well, thank you, anyway. It's been a tough time trying to fit in with this crew, but you've been there for me the whole time. Whether you admit it or not.

NEEVA: Not. Now, are you ready for the starboard nacelle?

J'NAYA: Actually – I'm sorry! – I'd better grab my engineering kit quick – really sorry!

(She goes into her quarters. Neeva follows.)

LOCATION: KESTRA J'NAYA'S QUARTERS

(Kestra immediately heads to the far side of the room to get her kit out of a drawer.)

NEEVA: It's really not a problem. Is that... cake?

J'NAYA: Yes!

NEEVA: It's beautiful. What replicator pattern is that?

J'NAYA: (chuckling) It's not! I baked it!

NEEVA: What, by yourself?

J'NAYA: There's no substitute! Neeva, you look like you've never seen real baked goods before!

(Silence.)

NEEVA: To be honest... I'm not sure that I have.

J'NAYA: You're teasing me.

NEEVA: Not even a little!

J'NAYA: Now I know how to repay you for coming with me today.

NEEVA: You don't have [to do anything special.]

J'NAYA: I'm teaching you to bake. And that's final. What are you doing at eighteen hundred tomorrow?

NEEVA: I have a date, actually.

J'NAYA: Ooooooh. I've always wondered what those dates must be like.

NEEVA: Very... earnest. We're both romantics, but we're also both engineers. The results are... about what you'd expect. Alecz Lorhrok is surprisingly traditional in a lot of ways.

J'NAYA: You do seem happy!

NEEVA: Am I that easy to read?

J'NAYA: Well, I've only known you a few months, but that smile just now...

NEEVA: I am that easy to read. Ugh.

J'NAYA: What's wrong with being happy?

NEEVA: I have a reputation as strict and hard to please.

J'NAYA : I think Lieutenant Yubari still outranks you there.

NEEVA: I'm a very competitive person, Kestra, don't tempt me.

J'NAYA: Oh, I would never. You look plenty stern. Forget I said anything. An all-seeing all-knowing queen who rules over Ship's Operations with an iron fist.

NEEVA: It's good to get the recognition I deserve.

J'NAYA: And so humble!

NEEVA: Humility never got me anywhere. Come on.

J'NAYA: Yes, ma'am!

(They exit back into the corridor.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

NEEVA: The first thing you need to know is that the starboard nacelle is named Sulu.

J'NAYA: Yes, I heard that from Jack. S for Starboard, S for Sulu, makes sense. But, I always wondered: what do you call the port nacelle?

NEEVA: We call it "The port nacelle." (shrugs) I know. Only *Excelsior* captain with a "P"-name was Palmer and we did not want to name anything for him.

(They enter a turbolift.)

J'NAYA : Deck Twenty-Six!

(The doors close, and they are gone.)

SCENE 4E-05**LOCATION: TRANSPORTER ROOM**

(Lorhrok, Yubari, and their team rematerialize on the platform.)

DOVAN: Welcome back, Lexi!

LORHROK: Lexi? You've never called me that before, Captain.

DOVAN: And I think I never will again. Sorry. Rolls off the tongue all wrong. Forget I said it. How were the Dronegars?

LORHROK: Dronegans. Well, their ship's fit as a fiddle, thanks to Commander J'naya's A-Team here. And they seem like nice enough people. Just a little out of their depth.

DOVAN: Walk with me. You too, Yubari.

YUBARI: Sir.

(They walk into the corridor.)

LOCATION: CORRIDOR

DOVAN: "Out of their depth"? How do you mean?

LORHROK: Well, they're kitted out for a long-term mission. Apparently they're explorers, sent to a specific destination.

DOVAN: Where?

LORHROK: They didn't tell me. Lord Harth said you should call him now that repairs are finished.

DOVAN: I will.

LORHROK: Only... it's as though they didn't think it through very hard. The parts they're using are too flimsy for sustained warp travel. You already know they're not well-armed.

DOVAN: Or at all.

LORHROK: Right. And, I don't know what their metabolisms are like, but I can't see how the food stores I saw are going to be enough to cover them for a two-year round trip.

DOVAN: Two years?

LORHROK: Their engines max out at warp one-point-eight. And that's emergency speed. Lord Harth told me the ship needs to go five light-years and back. Now, we could cover that distance in a day. But, on those engines...

DOVAN: Two years.

LORHROK: Frankly, sir, they're lucky they made it this far. And they're lucky their chambers coil burnt out when it did: they still have enough juice to get home.

DOVAN: They're abandoning their mission?

LORHROK: That was my strong recommendation. I'm impressed by how little wear there's been on the deflector couplings so far, but no chance it lasts more than another ten months before it burns out and leaves them stranded and starving somewhere.

DOVAN: How did Lord Harth take that advice?

LORHROK: He said he'd look over my data. Which is better than I would have expected, sir, under the circumstances.

(They enter a turbolift.)

LOCATION: TURBOLIFT

DOVAN: Yeah, me too. If you told me I had to abandon my mission because the *Excelsior* was falling apart, you'd find yourself in the brig. Well, not you you, Alecz, but...

LORHROK: I understand.

DOVAN: Bridge. (turbolift starts moving) What were your impressions, Yubari? You saw the same things as Mister Lorchrok here.

LORHROK: Actually, no, she didn't. Not mostly.

DOVAN: What's this?

YUBARI: There was an accident.

LORHROK: I told you how flimsy everything on this ship was. Well, the lift Yubari was on – I really can't call it a turbolift, more like an elevator – it got stuck.

DOVAN: Stuck? How long?

YUBARI: Over an hour.

LORHROK: That ship really is falling apart. Bennett and Tigan stayed to help get her out while the rest of us went on to repair the chambers coil.

DOVAN: Sorry to hear it. Were you able to finish the command training assignment I gave you before you left?

YUBARI: No, sir, I'm sorry. I was alone when the lift broke down, out-of-contact with the away team...

DOVAN: Doesn't matter, Lieutenant. I understand.

(The turbolift stops. They exit.)

LOCATION: BRIDGE

(Dovan, Yubari, and Lohrok walk out to their various stations.)

NEEVA: Captain on deck!

DOVAN: As you were.

NEEVA: Sir, you have an incoming message from the Dronegar ship. Addressed to you personally.

DOVAN: Thank you, Commander. On screen.

(The viewscreen activates.)

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *Captain Dovan, we wish to thank you once again for your assistance. I do not believe I exaggerate when I say that you and your "Federation" saved all our lives. The Dronegan people will not forget such kindness.*

DOVAN: I can't wait to tell Admiral Parker you said so.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *You sell yourself short, Captain! Now, if you will allow us to pay you one small favor, in return.*

DOVAN: That's not necessary, Lord Harth. Perhaps, one day, your people will be able to join the Federation, as members. That's all the reward I need.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *I believe we should like that very much, Captain. However, it is many years in the future, at best. My shifgrethor [SHIF-gray-thor] would be harmed irreparably if I were to accept your aid without even attempting to give you a token of gratitude.*

DOVAN: Well, I wouldn't want to harm your *shifgren*... er... *shithreg*... I wouldn't want to hurt your reputation, Lord Harth. So long as this "token" is something you and your crew can afford to spare.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *I'm afraid we can't but spare it, Captain. Your engineer's assessment of our ship's condition was dire indeed. It seems we will not be able to complete our mission of exploration. We must return home. We are therefore able to offer our mission to you, Captain Dovan, instead. This is a meagre token indeed, but it is all we have to spare for the difficult voyage back to Dronegar.*

DOVAN: You're offering the *Excelsior* your mission? That's... kind of neat, actually. You say it's a mission of exploration?

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *More than that, Captain. We set sail to find nothing less than the doorway of the gods. The ancient ones, the Scions, used great portals to move their Dreadnoughts between the distant stars.*

LORHROK: An Iconian gateway.

NEEVA: Megagateway, if ships can fly through it.

YUBARI: Then they're in trouble. The Iconian Gateway to the Alpha Quadrant is a few hundred light-years in the opposite direction.

LORHROK: Well, ours is. Maybe theirs isn't!

DOVAN: What do you mean, Alec?

LORHROK: Another gateway. Starfleet's always believed the Iconians built a network of gateways, not just the two we have. We've simply never found any more. But maybe the Dronegans did.

DOVAN: That would be an incredible discovery. Lord Harth, we gratefully accept this gift – not merely as payment, but as a sign of new friendship. We will explore the area and let your people know what we find.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *I am so glad. We will relay the spatial coordinates to your pilot.*

NEEVA: Coordinates received.

ALIEN CAPTAIN: *We wish you well, Excelsior. Harth, out.*

LORHROK: Finally, we have a lead on the Iconians – and maybe the Mapstone. All the time we've wasted in the Jathlin Arm is paying off.

NEEVA: All because of a little kindness to strangers.

DOVAN: Yes, yes, three cheers for truth, justice, and the Starfleet way. Let's not get our hopes up too high. Lay in that course, Helm, and engage at full cruising speed. Then I want a senior staff briefing. Ten minutes.

LORHROK: Aye, sir.

LOCATION: SPACE

(The ship jumps to warp.)

SCENE 4E-06**LOCATION: BRIEFING ROOM**

(Sharp comes into the briefing, huffing and puffing a little.)

SHARP: You know, we could stand to have a little warning before the staff meetings. I had a light afternoon ahead, I'd just replicated lunch, and then a "reminder" for this meeting popped up on my calendar out of nowhere three minutes ago.

DOVAN: Sorry, Melissa. That was inconsiderate of me.

SHARP: It's... fine. You're the captain. Apology accepted. Where's Asuka?

DOVAN: Bridge. Somebody's got to fly the ship, and I figured she could use the experience before she gets that next pip. Ensign Rol is keeping an eye on her.

LORHROK: With respect, Captain, shouldn't Bev be here for this? He's been fighting this war for twenty years – longer than any of us.

DOVAN: All the more reason to let him be. Take your seats, everyone.

J'NAYA: I'm a little confused about the point of this meeting myself, sir. It was labeled "senior staff: onboarding." Are we training in a new department head?

NEEVA: I'm afraid so, Kestra.

J'NAYA: Who?

Notably, this is the first apology (of any kind) Dovan has offered Sharp since Gevinon, when he lied to her and potentially shattered their relationship

LORHROK: You.

J'NAYA: But I've been here six months! Sir, if this is about Adow's intermix experiment, I can ex[plain everything].

DOVAN: It's not about Adow's intermix experiment... although that does sound like something I'd like to hear about. ...Later. Commander, you came to me this morning wondering what we're doing in the Jathlin Arm. You expressed your concern that we don't know what we're doing out here. You even aired a suspicion that everyone else on the ship knew something you didn't.

J'NAYA: S— sir, I certainly didn't in- intend to accuse the entire senior staff of some kind of... conspiracy, I was just saying that sometimes it felt like [I'm the only one aboard too stupid to understand what's going on].

DOVAN: Well, you'd have been right. There is a conspiracy aboard this ship. You're been an exemplary chief engineer. It's high time we read you in.

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: Wait. Is this the part where you let me in on the Big Secret? About your classified mission last year to save the galaxy?

SHARP: Yyyup.

LORHROK: Only... we didn't really save the galaxy.

DOVAN: Hell, the galaxy can't be saved. Sooner or later — probably sooner — we and everyone else you've ever known or loved is going to die, violently, at the hands of an unstoppable enemy. At least, that's the opinion of the President of the United Federation of Planets. Our mission last year wasn't to save the galaxy. We bought the galaxy a few more years, at best.

SHARP: Gentlemen, we don't need to scare her to death. Just apologize to her for keeping it secret and get on with it.

NEEVA: We are sorry. We froze you out because it's very classified — when we said it could destroy the galaxy, that wasn't a joke — but also... also...

LORHROK: ...but also because it isn't easy to live with this knowledge. It's a sword hanging over your head every hour of every day. We like you, Kestra, we really do. We didn't want to make you share this burden.

DOVAN: At some level, I think we may have even liked having you not know. You reminded us of what life was like before we learned about it. Of what we're fighting for.

NEEVA: He's right. Thank you for that, Kestra. It was more precious than you know.

J'NAYA: I, um... Well —

SHARP: Oh, for Pete's sake, people. What the hell's she supposed to say to that? Get on with it.

DOVAN: You're right, Melissa. She cleared the medical examination; we can speak freely now.

J'NAYA: Medical... You didn't lose my exam records.

NEEVA: I'm sorry.

J'NAYA: You knew?

DOVAN: And was absolutely forbidden to tell you the truth. You had to be vetted, Commander.

J'NAYA: Why? You all know me by now.

DOVAN: The Federation is at war, Commander. You haven't heard about this war, because it is perhaps the most complete secret in this galaxy. Outside the *Excelsior*, you can count on two hands the number of living people who know about it. Even our enemy doesn't know we're fighting them — and it is imperative it stay that way, because open war will mean swift and total annihilation of everything we hold dear. (pause) They're called the bluegills.

LORHROK: They're a race of neural parasites who can burrow into your skull and take control of your body. As long as there's a queen within about twenty million kilometers, that bug owns you.

NEEVA: It is not nearly as pleasant as it sounds.

SHARP: They can make you do things... Things that...

DOVAN: I think Commander J'naya has the idea. What the bluegills did to you is worse than anything I can imagine.

LORHROK: And they want to do it to the entire galaxy.

DOVAN: So, Commander, we had to be sure you weren't one of them. Anyone could be. Including any of your fellow officers. Anything less than constant vigilance is a death sentence.

J'NAYA: So we're out here on... some kind of mission? Against these bluegills?

DOVAN: We're looking for an artifact, called the Mapstone. If we find it, it will lead us to an Iconian treasure trove called Avalon. If we can get there before they do...

LORHROK: This war has been going on for almost twenty years. If we found Avalon, it might – honestly – be the first ray of real hope we've ever had.

J'NAYA: And if they find it instead?

LORHROK: How did Commander Underwood put it?

NEEVA: "Bye-bye Milky Way."

DOVAN: We only have one clue. Admiral Parker discovered a Scion inscription on Union... and we don't think the bluegills have it yet.

LORHROK: "Seven stars point to three."

NEEVA: "Find the second; we will meet."

DOVAN: Which is great, but we have no idea what it means. So its value as a leg up against the bluegills is arguably outweighed by the thousands of ships and infinitely powerful technology they're devoting to the search.

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: This is a lot to handle.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Should we stop?

LORHROK: I don't think so.

SHARP: She deserves to know it all.

NEEVA: She needs to.

DOVAN: (sighs) (pause) Alright. (pause) I'd hoped to spare you this. (pause) Commander, are you familiar with the myth of the Sword of Damocles?

SCENE 4E-07**LOCATION: SPACE**

(The *Excelsior* cruises by at medium warp.)

LOCATION: BRIDGE

(Dovan enters the bridge.)

SYLVESTE: Captain on the bridge!

DOVAN: At ease, helmsman. Lieutenant Yubari, you're relieved.

YUBARI: I stand relieved.

NEEVA: Captain, I was just about to call you.

DOVAN: Why? Are we arriving early?

NEEVA: No, sir, something else. Can you come take a look at this?

DOVAN: I've got nothing better to do. (He walks over) What have you got?

NEEVA: Sensors picked up [something strange.]

DOVAN: Ah, ah — keep your voice down, Commander. No need for anyone else to hear this. Now, go ahead.

NEEVA: Yes, sir. Sensors have flagged a strange reading just off our aft dorsal and ventral sections. Here, look at the profile.

(She presses a button and the screen changes.)

DOVAN: A cloaked ship?

NEEVA: Two, actually. That or both our warp nacelles started leaking a bunch of particles they don't actually produce. Should I start the active scan?

DOVAN: Have you told anyone else about this?

NEEVA: No, sir. Only you.

DOVAN: Please keep it that way. Carry on.

NEEVA: Of course, sir. Should I do anything?

DOVAN: Passive scans only, Commander. You'll find Ensign Rol in Science Lab Three. Give your results to him, by hand, eyes only. Then forget those cloaked ships exist, Commander.

NEEVA: Yes, sir.

(Dovan returns to his center seat.)

LORHROK: How much time until we arrive at coordinates, Helm?

NEEVA: Dropping out of warp now.

LORHROK: All stop.

(Ship drops out of warp.)

DOVAN: Report.

YUBARI: Sensors read blank, sir. There's nothing here but normal background radiation.

LORHROK: Helm, I ordered all stop.

SYLVESTE: Helm answers all stop, sir.

LORHROK: Then why am I reading forward velocity of seventeen hundred kps?

SYLVESTE: Helm answers zero velocity, sir.

DOVAN: No, I'm seeing it too, Helm. We're moving.

NEEVA: Sir, we seem to be caught in a tractor beam of some kind. Immensely powerful.

LORHROK: Full reverse!

SYLVESTE: Full reverse, aye.

DOVAN: Where's it coming from?

NEEVA: Unknown, sir. There's nothing within a light-year.

YUBARI: We're being pulled in!

NEEVA: Engines having no effect.

LORHROK: Lock in the warp drive.

SYLVESTE: Warp drive locked in, sir.

NEEVA: No change.

DOVAN: We're throwing everything we have at it and I don't even feel it.

LORHROK: The beam's power level must be... well, on the Berman Scale, over nine thousand.

DOVAN: The Berman scale only goes up to five thousand Bermans.

LORHROK: Exactly.

DOVAN: Point taken. Red alert!

(The Red Alert klaxons sound.)

LORHROK: Neeva, do we have any idea — Great Prophet.

NEEVA: Now reading a very large sphere!

DOVAN: Well, that explains what's pulling us in.

LORHROK: Sir, we're already inside.

YUBARI: A gigantic sphere just appeared the moment we crossed into it. Could it be surrounded by a cloaking field?

LORHROK: What's the volume?

NEEVA: Meaninglessly large, sir. Radius is a hundred million kilometers.

DOVAN: And what's that glowing orb at the center?

NEEVA: It's a star, captain. (pause) A little on the small side, but it's G2V main sequence. There appears to be one planet orbiting.

LORHROK: We're inside a dyson sphere.

SYLVESTE: An invisible dyson sphere.

NEEVA: I'd say it's impossible, because the power requirements to cloak a dyson sphere would equal the total energy output of a small sun, but, well... they've got one. (sensor alert) Interior surface is M-class, but uninhabited. Signs of bombardment.

DOVAN: How long ago?

NEEVA: Unclear, sir. At least a hundred thousand years. Surface readings identical to the dyson sphere encountered on Stardate four-six-one-two-five.

SYLVESTE: Except for it being invisible.

NEEVA: Mind your instruments, Helm. But he's right, Captain.

YUBARI: Sir, I'm picking up a large spatial disturbance in orbit, approximately where a second planet would be. (sensor alert) It's an Iconian mega-gateway, captain. Diameter adequate for multiple-ship transit. Identical to both of the Gateways we've catalogued.

DOVAN: That's what we're here for. Bring us in, full impulse.

SYLVESTE: All ahead full impulse. Approaching now.

DOVAN: Neeva, punch up the activation codes for Union Gateway.

NEEVA: I have them, sir.

DOVAN: Transmit them to this Gate.

NEEVA: Translink channel open... transmitting now.

LORHROK: You're thinking this will open a wormhole back to Union Three. You really think the Gateways are able to network like that? Starfleet's theorized, but...

DOVAN: We're about to find out.

NEEVA: Gateway is responding... (Gateway activates) Gateway is active, sir.

DOVAN: Yubari, open hailing frequencies.

YUBARI: Hailing frequencies open.

DOVAN: This is Captain Alcar Dovan of the Federation starship *Excelsior*, calling anyone on the far side of this Gateway.

YUBARI: We're receiving a response.

DOVAN: On screen. (Viewscreen activates) Why, Admiral Parker! I was hoping it would be you.

PARKER: *Mister Dovan? At last report, you were months away from the Gateway. How is this possible?*

DOVAN: It's a long story. Lieutenant Yubari is transmitting our logs and reports now.

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

DOVAN: ...but suffice it to say we aren't calling from our Gateway. We're using a different one.

PARKER: *You discovered a second Gateway?*

LORHROK: (working on his console) That's not all, sir.

DOVAN: X.O., you have something for me?

LORHROK: Computer, activate main viewscreen, rear angle. (it does this) The portal that let us into the dyson sphere was left open. Look: you can still see stars through it.

DOVAN: Okay, yes, I see them.

LORHROK: And do you notice anything odd?

DOVAN: Um... there's ten of them? Most of them are yellow, which is my favorite color?

NEEVA: Not the individual stars, sir.

DOVAN: I was never good at these games. What are we looking at?

NEEVA: Ten stars, in two groups.

LORHROK: One group of seven, forming an arrow that points at the other three.

DOVAN: "Seven stars point to three..."

PARKER: *"...find the second; we will meet." Mister Dovan, that's the inscription we found in the Iconian ruins on Union. The Iconians must have wanted us to find this new gateway and follow the path from there. If the bluegills hadn't destroyed the obelisk...*

DOVAN: We would have already solved this riddle.

PARKER: *Go. Go now.*

DOVAN: Admiral, my report [isn't finished yet.]

PARKER: *Decorum be damned, Dovan. I'll assemble the Third Fleet here at Union. Now go!*

(Screen off.)

YUBARI: Channel closed, sir.

LORHROK: He hung up on us? Admiral Parker hung up on us?

DOVAN: He's right. Every second we waste talking about the Mapstone another chance for the bluegills to find it first. We have another breadcrumb... let's hope it's the last one. Lay in a course for the second star in the group of three.

SYLVESTE: Aye, sir.

DOVAN: Hit it.

(The ship jumps to warp.)

LORHROK: It sure is lucky the coordinates Lord Harth gave us were so exactly correct. If they'd been off even by a few kilometers, we would have missed the tractor beam. We might have eventually found the dyson sphere, even through the cloak, but the way to get inside? Never.

DOVAN: I hadn't thought of that, Alec. You're right. It was... very lucky.

SCENE 4E-08**LOCATION: CORRIDOR**

(Dovan walking along.)

DOVAN: Captain's Log, supplemental. I spent two hours staring at the ceiling tonight before I gave up. I've never had trouble falling asleep before. Once, on the Merrimack, I slept six hours hanging upside down from a dilithium articulation frame just to annoy Commander Dogface. I know this mission is more dangerous than it appears, probably more dangerous than anything we've done since Gevinon... but I slept like a baby before Gevinon. (sigh) If anyone asks, I'm touring the ship the night before a battle. Old naval tradition. But, confidentially, I'm looking for a nice quiet window seat, a glass of something blue, and a chance to ask myself... why am I afraid tonight? (blink) First stop, the Delta Lounge. At this hour, there's never anyone [there except Lio.]

(He walks through a door.)

LOCATION: DELTA LOUNGE

(The lounge is bursting with crew members. Loud, boisterous, filled with laughter. Music, as a band plays in the background.)

DOVAN: What in blazes? Why are...? Ah.

(Dovan begins walking toward some of the senior staff, who are gathered around a table.)

LORHROK: I mean, yes, you're right, it is an expectation for most Trill to pursue it, but it just never appealed to me.

NEEVA: Really? Not ever?

LORHROK: No! I've got enough going on in my brain without a whole other consciousness sharing my body, much less four or seven or fifty. The Symbiosis Commission can keep its joinings.

J'NAYA: What if you were [on a ship with a symbiont in a medical crisis and you were the only host?]

LORHROK: Oh, look here! It's a being who looks like Captain Dovan!

DOVAN: Uh, whatnow?

NEEVA: He even sounds like Captain Dovan!

SHARP: Remarkable!

DOVAN: I'm afraid I must have missed a staff briefing. Which is strange, since I run them.

LORHROK: Well, being-who-looks-like-Captain-Dovan, as you can see, there aren't any senior staff members here. I might look like First Officer Lorhrok, but, if I were him, wouldn't I be wearing rank insignia? Or a combadge?

SHAR: You might notice, if you look closely, that no one in this lounge—

J'NAYA: — this fine establishment —

SHARP: — has any rank insignia at all.

LORHROK: So while we may LOOK like the senior staff of the finest ship in Starfleet —

NEEVA: — in fact, we're just people.

DOVAN: Ah.

SHARP: You understand?

DOVAN: ...No.

NEEVA: Look, being-who-looks-like-Captain-Dovan, I can't help but notice you're still wearing your rank pips.

LORHROK: So he is!

J'NAYA: Well, we can't have that.

LORHROK: Absolutely not. Not in the Delta Lounge, at this hour.

NEEVA: You can't even get service here anymore if you look like a Captain, or a Lieutenant, or even a Doctor.

SHARP: It's true; the person who looks like Melissa Sharp learned that very quickly.

LORHROK: So, being-who-looks-like-Alcar-Dovan, perhaps you'd like to take off those heavy metal pips and join us? In fact, I believe this fine young human here was about to buy us another round.

J'NAYA: I was? I mean — yes, I was, wasn't I?

SHARP: But not for anyone wearing their pips. You understand.

LORHROK: He understands.

NEEVA: Drinks are only for beings, not for officers.

DOVAN: ...Alrrrrright. Let me just — (snap snap snap snap) — there.

(The beings who look like the senior staff send up a cheer.)

(Dovan sits down.)

LORHROK: I knew you could do it, Alcar!

J'NAYA : Okay, another round, same for everyone? Melissa, anything for you?

SHARP: Well... Melissa wants to, but Doctor Sharp would be pretty upset with her in the morning.

DOVAN: *Irinello* for me, Com — I mean, Kestra.

J'NAYA: Coming right up, Alc — Nope, still can't say it.

SHARP: Give it time, Kestra. Until then, give us drinks.

J'NAYA: Right, right. Sorry.

(Kestra starts pressing buttons on a padd.)

DOVAN: Now, what were you talking about before the, ah, the being who looked like Captain Dovan arrived?

SHARP: Neeva was telling us about her days as a space pirate.

NEEVA: Independent procurement contractor.

LORHROK: Right. Pirate.

NEEVA: I was nine!

J'NAYA: A nine-year-old space pirate!

NEEVA: Oh, boy. I think I'm actually done with war stories for tonight. Alecz was just telling us he never wanted to be Joined to a Trill symbiont.

LORHROK: It's true. I don't really get the appeal. I mean, I do, but it's just not for me. I feel as if... as if having more than one lifetime in my head would mean I wouldn't live this one to the fullest. There's enough beauty to experience in the galaxy, I wouldn't want to spoil it with someone else's memories ...of, of those experiences.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Wow, Alecz. Deep.

(Sharp, J'Naya, Dovan, and Lorhrok laugh)

SHARP: I wish I'd seen the galaxy that way.

NEEVA: You mean, without someone else in your head?

SHARP: Don't even joke, Neeva. (pause) No, I mean... for a long time after I got here, it was just a distraction. Something that had dragged me away from my research. After Gevinon, and all the... after everything that happened there, I felt like I never should have joined Starfleet.

DOVAN: Like it's sharpened you down to a point so fine you've lost yourself. Staying another day with that block of ice in your gut is unimaginable, but you've been in the Fleet so long that you know you can't live outside it anymore. (pause) (with a rueful chuckle) I guess I know the feeling, Melissa.

SHARP: I know, Alcar. And it took me so long to get past it, to see... the beauty of this galaxy. All the people we meet, and help.

LORHROK: Species no human has ever seen before, and yet... they're still just people.

SHARP: Yeah. Yeah, that's right, Alecz. And you were just born with that. I've come to envy you.

DOVAN: How did you learn, Melissa, to start healing those wounds?

SHARP: By watching you.

(Pause.)

(Hennessy comes up to the table.)

NURSE HENNESSY: Kestra? I have the drinks you ordered.

J'NAYA: Mike! Thank you. I'm pretty sure you know whose is whose.

SHARP: Heh. Saved by the beer.

(Short pause.)

NEEVA: Where's Bev, anyway? He owes me from Diplomacy night.

SHARP: What for?

NEEVA: He promised he'd get me something called "buffalo wings" if I allied with England against Germany.

SHARP: Wait, what? You betrayed me for wings?

NEEVA: He said they were really good.

LORHROK: Why would he want you and me at war with Melissa any -- wait, that's why you allied with me?

NEEVA: Wheels within wheels within wheels, Lorhrok.

LORHROK: I thought it was for love.

NEEVA: I play to win. So does Bev.

DOVAN: Unfortunately, he's still working on that project we discussed. It's a big one.

LORHROK: He should tear himself away for a few hours. Maker knows he needs the break. More than any of us, anyway.

SHARP: Kestra? You just went pale as a Reman.

J'NAYA: Ah, it's nothing.

SHARP: Nothing?

DOVAN: Next time just say your drink didn't agree with you.

J'NAYA: My, uh... drink didn't agree with me.

NEEVA: Too late.

J'NAYA: (sigh) It's just... Bev's always seemed so quiet. He trained the fighter squadron, manned the helm, played board games. He's the oldest Ensign I ever met, but he seemed content with that. And today I find out he's ex-special forces, used to be a General, that he killed all those people?

LORHROK: He wasn't responsible for those. He was responsible for stopping General Brahms at Union. He was responsible for ending the bluegill infestation of Gevinon – for saving everyone.

J'NAYA: I know he's your friend. Hell, he's my friend, too. But... I'm a little scared of him now.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: So, in Orion myth, there are two different hells for people with outstanding debts. There's level Four-Seventy, which is just like the heavenly levels, except you have to wear itchy clothes all the time. Definitely one of the best hells.

DOVAN: And the other?

NEEVA: Level Thirteen-thirteen. I don't recall the details of that one, but any hell over a thousand isn't anywhere you want to be. Eternal suffocation, worms chewing out your eyes....

SHARP: Why the difference?

NEEVA: Thirteen-thirteen is for people with big debts. Four-seventy is for people who are trying to pay them off.

LORHROK: People, this is a party. Why are we talking about this? Spast, Alex Bevoney Rol's the best man I've ever had the privilege of befriending.

DOVAN: Hey!

(Footsteps approach.)

LORHROK: Sorry, Alcar. He's not going to any kind of hell. Even if he were, I think the captain making everyone call him Bev is penance enough.

ROL: I still hate that.

NEEVA: Bev!

SHARP: You made it!

DOVAN: Ears burning, Bev?

LORHROK: Sit down, Alex; I'll get you a drink.

(Lorhrok stands.)

J'NAYA: Can't you just order it from here?

LORHROK: Lio owes me some of his private reserve. I'm gonna go track him down.

DOVAN: I'll come with.

(Dovan stands.)

LORHROK: Anyone else for anything?

SHARP: I think the being-that-looks-like-Melissa's had enough.

LORHROK: How about you, Neevs?

NEEVA: Alecz, I love you. Don't call me Neevs.

DOVAN: Perhaps "Neevy"?

LORHROK: You're really not on a roll with the nicknames today, Alcar.

J'NAYA: Perhaps... pirate??

NEEVA: Oh, for — go, get Bev his drink.

DOVAN: Yes, ma'am.

(Lorhrok and Dovan head over to the bar.)

LORHROK: Lio! Looks like he'll be a couple minutes.

DOVAN: I can wait. Busy night. Speaking of which, Alecz, who do I have to blame for this minor mutiny?

LORHROK: Well, sir, that is, Alcar, I believe that would be, ah, the ship's executive officer.

DOVAN: Uh-huh.

LORHROK: You see, the job of an executive officer is to make sure that the crew is operating at peak efficiency. And as you may know, like any machine, the crew needs maintenance.

DOVAN: Maintenance.

LORHROK: Downtime! Recharge time! You wouldn't expect the warp engines to run at warp nine for months on end.

DOVAN: Some captains might. Some captains do.

LORHROK: And what happens? You end up with overheated, cranky nacelles.

DOVAN: You made a better engineer than you do a poet.

LORHROK: Would you want to serve with cranky nacelles? Because I don't. So consider tonight... a pressure valve, I suppose.

DOVAN: This isn't the first time you've done this, either, is it?

LORHROK: ...No. Not the first.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: You're a good man, Alecz Lorhrok.

LORHROK: So you're not mad about the total breakdown of professional decorum among your senior staff, or the dissolution of the barriers between junior officers and departments happening all around us?

DOVAN: Ask Captain Dovan in the morning. Right now, go get Alcar another drink. Lio's ready.

LORHROK: Oh, I see he is. On it, sir!

(Alecz rises and heads down the bar at a fast walk.)

(In the background, we hear Kestra, Sharp, and Neeva laugh loudly at a joke Rol just told.)

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, supplemental to the supplemental. Now it seems obvious. I'm afraid I might lose all this.*

SCENE 4E-09**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR MAIN BRIDGE**

(Lorhrok strides on to the bridge.)

LORHROK: Captain.

DOVAN: Being-known-as-First-Officer.

LORHROK: Didn't want to miss the big reveal.

SYLVESTE: We're entering the T'Rel star system now, captain.

YUBARI: The star has one planet, small, rocky, no vegetation or water. It's orbiting very close to the sun.

NEEVA: But I'm still reading it as M-class. Temperate climate, breathable atmosphere.

SHARP: Where's that atmosphere coming from?

YUBARI: Nowhere I can see.

NEEVA: There is a small region near the magnetic south pole where I'm not reading anything.

DOVAN: What do you mean, anything?

NEEVA: The board's showing blank, captain. It must be a dampening field. A powerful one. Diameter approximately five hundred meters.

DOVAN: One last breadcrumb.

LORHROK: You think the Mapstone is down there, sir?

DOVAN: That's what my gut's telling me. (pause) Yubari, Sharp, Neeva: with me. We're beaming down.

LORHROK: Captain, your place is on the bridge.

DOVAN: Not this time, Alecz.

LORHROK: You know I'm a better diplomat than you are.

DOVAN: And you know I'm better when the stakes are this high. That's the only thing besides my birthday my Starfleet record has right. Move it, people. I'll catch up. (everyone heads for the turbolift but Dovan) Neeva, have quartermaster send pattern enhancers to transporter room one. We don't know how big the Mapstone is, so we may need to beam it out through that dampening field.

NEEVA: Aye, sir.

SHARP: That atmosphere is pretty thin, M-class or no. I'm going to need to give you all a tri-ox injection before we beam down.

YUBARI: Understood. Transporter room.

(The turbolift closes.)

DOVAN: Lieutenant Lorhrok, while we're down there, have Cargo Bay Two converted to a secure containment area. If we find the Mapstone, that's where we'll beam it. Ensign.

SYLVESTE: Sir?

DOVAN: The instant – the instant – we are back aboard, I want you to go to warp speed, on a direct course back to the dyson sphere Gateway. Don't wait for orders, don't wait to confirm we have the Mapstone. Full warp.

SYLVESTE: You want me to go to warp inside a star system?

(Dovan walks over to the turbolift and enters.)

DOVAN: Mister Rol will feed you the necessary calculations. He's been working on them for days. Oh, and one more thing: I want Warp Nine-point-nine-nine-nine.

SYLVESTE: Four nines, sir? That's well above engine tolerance.

LORHROK: We may not sustain it for long, but we'll get it for you, sir.

DOVAN: That'll be fine, Lieutenant.

LORHROK: I'll have Kestra get on it.

DOVAN: (exhale) Okay. That's all. Wish me luck, Alecz?

LORHROK: No matter where you go, sir.

DOVAN: There you are. Transporter room one.

(Doors close, he departs.)

SYLVESTE: I hope he knows what he's doing.

LORHROK: Focus on your station, Ensign. So do I.

SCENE 4E-10**LOCATION: PLANET SURFACE**

(The away team — Dovan, Yubari, Neeva, and Sharp — beams down.)

NEEVA: The edge of the dampening field is just over... oh, wow.

DOVAN: It looks like a black wall.

NEEVA: That's because the dampening effect is so total that not even light can escape it.

SHARP: Is it safe?

NEEVA: To enter? Yes. But as for what's inside? I have absolutely no idea.

DOVAN: Any point in tricorders?

NEEVA: I doubt it.

DOVAN: Let's go.

YUBARI: I'll take point, captain.

DOVAN: We'll all go through at the same time. Three. Two. One.

(They all take two steps on the gravelly ground.)

SHARP: Well, that was easier than I thought. It looks exactly the same in here.

YUBARI: Look! Over there! In the center!

DOVAN: What is that? An altar, or something?

NEEVA: More like a small enclosure.

SHARP: I see something inside.

DOVAN: The Mapstone? Come on.

(They walk over to it. Neeva pulls out her tricorder and runs a quick scan.)

NEEVA: Inside the enclosure is a metal pyramid. One meter in each dimension. It seems to be generating the atmosphere.

DOVAN: For this bubble?

NEEVA: For the planet. Air pockets are phasing in and out of existence just above the... well, I assume it's the Mapstone.

DOVAN: Why?

NEEVA: Well, for one thing, it appears to be made of solid neutronium, which is both centuries ahead of our technology and raises serious questions about how it's doing that atmosphere trick. No circuits.

SHARP: Could just be a weather artifact.

NEEVA: For another thing, my tricorder says the inscription on the bottom face of the pyramid is the Iconian word for "map to Avalon".

DOVAN: Well, that's refreshingly direct. So we just grab it and OW! [beam it up.]

(His hand strikes a forcefield.)

NEEVA: First we have to get past the forcefield, sir.

YUBARI: Also, isn't neutronium hyper-dense?

NEEVA: That, too. We can't just pick it up, because that little pyramid weighs more than the *Excelsior*.

DOVAN: Well, we can beam it out with the enhancers. But how do we get through the forcefield?

BRAHMS: You have to convince me to turn it off.

(Isaac Brahms just appeared out of nowhere.)

SHARP: BRAHMS!

DOVAN: Brahms. Weren't you dead?

BRAHMS: I still am. You were a fool to come here, Dovan.

DOVAN: Yes, I know, but I was hoping we could talk about you for a minute. You did a hell of a thing to Lieutenant Yubari in the Star Fountain.

BRAHMS: I saved her life. And all of yours!

DOVAN: Yeah, that always seems to be your excuse, doesn't it? How about it, Lieutenant? You have anything you want to say to the General right now?

(Pause.)

YUBARI: No, I don't. He knows exactly why.

DOVAN: I'd say that's apology not accepted. How'd you get off Gevinon, Brahms?

BRAHMS: (with ERMEZ and TRIASSA overlaying him) I am both more and less than the man you called Isaac Brahms. I am ambassador. Prototype. Penitent.

SHARP: ...the hell?

BRAHMS: And you, Captain Alcar Dovan, are as blind as ever. Can't you see you just walked into a trap?

DOVAN: Of course it's a trap!

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: What?

DOVAN: That Dronegar ship was too good to be true. Bunch of generic bumpy-heads show up outta nowhere and give us exactly what we're looking for? Everything about them felt wrong — flimsy materials, not enough food, how could they have even made it out that far? But they happen to have the exact coordinates, to within a meter, for the only entrance to an invisible dyson sphere in a distant star system they've never visited? Ensign Rol raised his suspicions with me before the Away Team even beamed over. He's been one step ahead of them ever since.

NEEVA: I thought Captain Dovan was being paranoid at first, but the cloaked ships that have been following us ever since were a dead giveaway. The Dronegars were a honey pot put in our path by the bluegills. Everyone on that ship was probably controlled by a bug in his head.

BRAHMS: You're right. Dronegar Prime fell in the very first days of the War. There hasn't been a free Dronegar born in almost twenty years.

SHARP: The bluegills must have known, or guessed, that we had a clue they didn't — the "seven stars" inscription. Their search hasn't gotten them the Mapstone, so they figured, let's see what the Federation knows.

DOVAN: So they made sure we visited that dyson sphere, which gave us the perfect opportunity to lead them straight to you.

BRAHMS: You knew? You knew it was a trap, and you came anyway?

DOVAN: Of course we came anyway! The Mapstone is our one and only chance at stopping the enslavement of the galaxy, and this was our one and only chance at finding it. The bluegills have a thousand ships in their fleet! They'd get here eventually anyway. But, this way, we're here to take it out from under their noses. It's our trap within a trap.

YUBARI: I don't think it's going to be that easy, sir.

DOVAN: Well, you wouldn't, would you, Lieutenant? What is your name, anyway? It's certainly not Yubari.

YUBARI: Captain? What are you talking about?

DOVAN: Trapped on the Dronegar ship, in an elevator, alone, for an hour? Come on, Mister Bug. I knew what you were one minute after you beamed aboard. I asked if Lieutenant Yubari had completed her command training assignment —

YUBARI: I told you the truth! I couldn't!

(Dovan take a step towards her.)

DOVAN: I didn't give Lieutenant Yubari a training assignment! She's already earned that promotion! I give you points for blending in, that vague contentless snarl at Brahm's just now was masterful, but you're not half as sneaky as you think you are. Lords, you had to keep your cloaked ships running almost on top of us just so you could stay in range of your queen!

YUBARI: Captain Dovan, I swear!

DOVAN: Save it. What do you think I've had Ensign Rol doing the past few days? He's been spying on you. You tried to sabotage the *Excelsior*. Rol repaired it. You tried to contact your king on those cloaked ships; Rol intercepted and altered your transmission. The reinforcements you asked for aren't coming. The *Excelsior* won't explode when it goes to warp. You think you're an infiltrator, but you went up against the infiltration specialist — and lost. (he pulls out his sidearm and charges it) You'll be escorted to sickbay, where you will be removed from the body of my chief of security and... is something funny?

YUBARI: (chuckles) It's funny that you think that phaser's on. Look at the display.

DOVAN: No main power cell?

YUBARI: I removed all of them right before we beamed down, while Rol was on the bridge. Except mine, of course. (she pulls and charges her own phaser) Set to kill.

DOVAN: Okay, given that I knew you were a spy, I should have seen that one coming.

BRAHMS: A fallback trap. Yes, you should have.

DOVAN: Oh, wait, I did. That tri-ox injection when we beamed down? Not really a tri-ox injection. Melissa?

(Sharp presses a button.)

YUBARI: (passing out) Uhhhnn...

SHARP: It was my famous twelve cee-cee instant paralysis cocktail.

(Yubari's body hits the ground.)

NEEVA: She'll be asleep for an hour?

SHARP: Or until we wake her up.

DOVAN: Trap in a trap in a trap in a trap, Brahms. Impressed?

BRAHMS: You still have two bluegill cruisers in orbit, ready to pounce. They outgun you.

DOVAN: But outrun us? We don't think so.

BRAHMS: You don't think so?

NEEVA: I've run the numbers. It'll be close. But as long as we get a small head start, we should be able to get back to the Dyson Gateway before they catch us.

DOVAN: Once we're through to Union, we'll be safe. Starbase Nine-Eleven and the Third Fleet will be waiting for us. Get those pattern enhances set up, ladies.

(They do so.)

BRAHMS: Why not have the fleet meet you halfway?

NEEVA: Admiral Parker doesn't have the control codes to reach the Dyson Gate from his end. That'll take six weeks and a full science team to work out.

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: You haven't left me with much choice. If I give you the Mapstone, I gamble everything I died for in the hope of you outrunning a pair of advanced cruisers. But if I keep it from you...

SHARP: Then the bluegills learn where the Mapstone is and come take it anyway.

BRAHMS: You won't even know how to use the Mapstone for decades, Dovan. This won't end the war. Not tomorrow, anyway.

DOVAN: But it will give us hope. You should have seen Mister Rol's face light up when he realized we could get it.

BRAHMS: Is he alright, my Alex?

DOVAN: He's got big debts. But he's trying to pay them off.

BRAHMS: This was all his idea, wasn't it?

DOVAN: You could learn something from him, Brahms. Now give us the Mapstone.

BRAHMS: There. It's done.

SHARP: It is? I didn't see anything.

BRAHMS: Human perception is so narrow, Doctor. Angels and demons dance around your heads, yet all you see is atoms and the void.

DOVAN: The forcefield's gone. I can reach the Mapstone now. Lords, it is heavy. And cold. Ow!

NEEVA: Sir, I told you it weighs more than the *Excelsior*, right?

DOVAN: I thought you were joking.

NEEVA: We almost have the pattern enhancers set up.

BRAHMS: Dovan, a word of advice.

DOVAN: Brahms, it's a flat-out race to the Gateway. The only advice you can give me is "go faster."

BRAHMS: Not about that.

DOVAN: Even then – of all the mass murderers I know, you're the last I would take advice from.

BRAHMS: Alex Bevoney Rol has his penances, and I have mine. But perhaps you'd rather hear it (with Triassa) from someone else.

BRAHMS (+ TRIASSA): It must be known that there are no good sides in this war, Captain Alcar Dovan. There are only good people – and not enough.

BRAHMS [+ ERMEZ]: Listen to him, Bolian. He started it, after all.

SHARP: We're ready, Alcar. The Mapstone is ready to transport.

DOVAN: Energize.

(They beam up.)

SCENE 4E-11**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(Red alert just began.)

LORHROK: Now, Ensign! Hit it!

SYLVESTE: Four nines... engage!

(The ship jumps to warp!)

SCENE 4E-12**LOCATION: SICKBAY**

(Medical alarms going off. Yubari is convulsing on a biobed.)

SHARP: Tie her down!

HENNESSY: She's too strong!

SHARP: She's seizing! I need to get in there!

(Hypospray. Medical alarms die down gradually to a regular heartbeat.)

DOVAN: Is she going to be okay?

SHARP: I don't know. We've never killed a bluegill this way before. The parasite in Asuka Yubari's brain is definitely dying; we've warped out of range of the mother organism and it can't survive. But the damage it'll do to Asuka, the real Asuka... it could be nothing, or it could kill her. We should know by the time we reach the Gateway.

DOVAN: You're her best friend, Melissa. There's no one in the universe she'd rather have at her side right now. You'll do what's best for her. I know that. (pause) I have to get to the bridge.

SCENE 4E-13**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(Dovan enters.)

SYLVESTE: Captain on the bridge!

DOVAN: Status.

SYLVESTE: We're coming up on the dyson sphere. The bluegill cruisers have been gaining on us, but not quickly enough.

LORHROK: Us jumping to extreme warp in the middle of a star system left them staring slackjawed for a few minutes. Rol's on his way up now.

(Turbolift opens, disgorging Rol and Neeva.)

ROL: Sir?

DOVAN: Speak of the devil. Ensign Rol, Commander Neeva – take your stations. Helmsman, stand down to auxiliary control station.

SYLVESTE: Aye, sir.

(Sylveste changes to a different station; Rol walks over and takes his station; Neeva does same.)

NEEVA: Mapstone is secure in Cargo Bay Two.

DOVAN: Any surprises?

NEEVA: Well, first it tried to start recycling the *Excelsior's* atmosphere like it was on the planet. We put a stop to that with a well-modulated forcefield, so then it started broadcasting the thoughts of everyone within ten meters to everyone else. Turned everyone in the cargo bay into telepaths.

DOVAN: How'd you stop that?

NEEVA: We didn't. I'm not sure I'm ever going to be able to look Ensign Adow in the eye again. That rock may claim to be a map, Captain, but deep scans show it is much, much more than that. Brahms wasn't kidding about it taking decades to make sense of it.

DOVAN: Well, once we're home, we can see what the Daystrom Institute has to say about that. Time, Rol.

ROL: Depends.

DOVAN: Depends? On what?

SYLVESTE: On how much you want us to slow down before we hit the Gateway.

LORHROK: If we shed even a few warp factors, the bluegills could drop in on top of us before we enter the transit corridor.

SYLVESTE: Speaking freely, sir, entering the Gateway at this speed would be insanely reckless.

LORHROK: Bev?

ROL: That's my whole job description, sir.

LORHROK: But can you do it?

ROL: With a phaser in hand and a cheerful smirk.

DOVAN: I could be wrong, but I think this is the first time I've ever seen you smile, Ensign.

ROL: That may be, sir.

DOVAN: I don't like it. Cut it out. But get us home.

LORHROK: Can we transmit the Gateway activation codes from here?

NEEVA: We're just entering range now.

LORHROK: Transmit.

(Yubari enters the bridge from a turbolift.)

YUBARI: Reporting for duty, captain.

DOVAN: Yubari, welcome back. How are you feeling?

YUBARI: Murderous, sir. I'd really like to fire a few dozen quantum torpedoes into those bluegill hulls.

DOVAN: Good to have you back, Lieutenant. Take your station.

YUBARI: Thank you, sir.

LORHROK: Helm, we never got an answer. How much time?

SYLVESTE: Ensign Rol is busy computing our trajectory, but we'll enter the dyson sphere at full warp in under two minutes. We'll be in the Gateway less than a second later.

DOVAN: And the bluegills?

NEEVA: Hold on. They're accelerating.

DOVAN: One last sprint to the finish, huh?

NEEVA: They're overloading their engines! They'll blow up!

LORHROK: Not if they knock us out of warp first. Time to intercept?

SYLVESTE: They'll make it a lot closer than we originally calculated... but not close enough. We'll still make the Gateway six seconds before they can disrupt our warp field.

NEEVA: Sir, I'm picking up a transmission from the bluegill ship.

DOVAN: That's weird. Not usually big talkers. On screen.

NEEVA: It's not directed at us, sir. They're transmitting to... the Gateway itself.

LORHROK: What?

NEEVA: It looks a little bit like a Gateway control code—

DOVAN: Countermand it!

NEEVA: — but it's not. Whatever it is hasn't overridden our destination coordinates: we're still locked in to Union System.

LORHROK: But we don't know what it does override.

DOVAN: We can't go through there without knowing what they did! Helm, all stop! Turn and fight!

SYLVESTE: Too late! Gateway transition in three! Two! ONE!

LOCATION: SPACE

(The Excelsior hits the Gateway, the Gateway does its usual effects, and... they're gone.)

SCENE 4E-14**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

SYLVESTE: Transition complete!

DOVAN: Yubari, hail the Starbase! Tell them company's coming!

YUBARI: I... I can't! Sir, I'm not detecting Starbase Nine-Eleven anywhere in the system!

NEEVA: I'm reading no Federation transponder codes at all. The system's empty, captain!

LORHROK: Union Three has a thriving colony! How could the bluegills make it disappear with a single Iconian control code?

DOVAN: Wherever they are, we need to [find them, and fast.]

SYLVESTE: We're out of time, sirs! Enemy ships coming through now!

DOVAN: All about! Front shields to full, phaser arrays one, three, five lock in! Ensign! Get to hangar deck and launch all fighters!

SYLVESTE: Aye, sir!

(Sylveste hops up and runs to a turbolift.)

YUBARI: Targets acquired! Ready to fire!

DOVAN: Fire!

(The *Excelsior* fires!)

YUBARI: Some damage to their shields. They're returning fire!

(The *Excelsior* is hit by several heavy blows.)

LORHROK: Brahms wasn't kidding about their guns. Helm, evasive pattern Van Citters Three-One!

DOVAN: Keep us alive, Rol.

ROL: Aye, sir.

DOVAN: Yubari, fire whenever you have a shot. Neeva, damage report.

NEEVA: Nacelle couplings were hit. Fighter launch systems offline, and we can make warp nine-point-one, tops.

LORHROK: That's not enough to outrun them.

NEEVA: There's more. Both enemy ships knew exactly where to fire — they targeted Cargo Bay Two. Shields weren't expecting a full attack there.

LORHROK: What happened?

NEEVA: The section vented into space. Five dead.

LORHROK: And the Mapstone?

NEEVA: There was a brief transporter signal in that section. I can't be certain, but I think they beamed it out.

LORHROK: Then the bluegills have the Mapstone. And, with it, everything they need to conquer the galaxy.

DOVAN: And they're going to start by finishing us off.

NARRATOR: *TO BE CONTINUED...*