

Assignment: Universe (Starship: Excelsior)

"Nurturing Life"

(Season 5, Episode 10)

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 5D-01**LOCATION: OFFICE CUBICLE**

A woman is typing away at a workstation. She's got a keyboard and a desktop computer.

PENNY: Computer, isolate contaminants report for Happy Pops Travel Pack, SKU nine-nine-five-one-two-eight.

CENTAURUS COMPUTER: *Threshold contaminants in that product include: lectrose, dexalin, estrogen, ash, [food dye number seven, fluoride, and leprosy.]*

PENNY: (snaps her fingers) Ash! I knew I was forgetting one! Give this nutrition label a regional variant. Hide the ash in all star systems where we don't legally have to disclose it. Then approve and send both labels to keyline!

CENTAURUS COMPUTER: *Affirmative.*

PENNY: Okay, that's ten labels in fifteen minutes. New goal is fifteen in the next ten. It's such a privilege to spend my life helping Centaurus nurture others, so I've gotta give a hundred ten percent! Computer, call up the next-- whoa, uhn.

(A short but loud *thrum* that comes from the walls of her cubicle.)

PENNY: What? Where...? Oh, (gulp) I feel like I need to throw up. (small moan) Am I still at Centaurus Foods? Where's Jaylix? Why is everything so... fuzzy?

(Penny's desk phone rings. She ignores its first couple rings, instead just taking some deep breaths and groaning a bit.)

(The phone keeps ringing.)

(Finally, Penny hesitantly picks up.)

PENNY: Um... hello?

VANCE: *Hi! I'm looking for Pendara Q'Lek [cue-LEK] of the Centaurus Foods Packaging Department?*

PENNY: I, uh... yes, this is Penny speaking. Who is this?

VANCE: *Great! Well, Pendara, I'm so sorry to bother you in the middle of a productive workday. This is Silas Vance up in Humanoid Resources.*

PENNY: Is this about my new hire training? Shouldn't my husband be here? We were hired together, this, uh... this... [morning? week? Month?]

VANCE: *Ha ha, no, I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you today. As you know, [Pendara, the company is forced to terminate some of our valued employees each cycle.]*

PENNY: He's got this bright blue mane... do you know where my husband is? Jaylix Q'Lek?

VANCE: As you know, Pendara, Centaurus Foods has to terminate some of our valued employees each cycle. Now, I know you have many years of terrific service here, Pendara, [but your productivity has been slipping for two quarters.]

PENNY: Years?

VANCE: Yes, eight and a half, by my records, but your productivity has been slipping for two quarters.

PENNY: I only started here a couple weeks ago! I mean, at least... it can't have been more than a month, can it?

VANCE: As you know, we spend one hundred ten percent of our time here finding better ways to nurture the lives of others! And, unfortunately, Pendaro, what we found this cycle is that a smaller team will be a more nurturing team. Nothing personal, but you're terminated from your employment here, effective immediately.

PENNY: You're firing me? Wait, no, that's not important. Did you do something to me, Vance? Where the hell is Jaylix? And my... my son? I was pregnant when you hired me! What happ[ened to me?!]

VANCE: Again, I'm very sorry, Pendaro, but this is where your path diverges from ours. Centaurus Foods hopes, wherever you find yourself in your future, you are always helping advance our mission of Nurturing Life. Good-bye.

(Click.)

(In the background, that sinister-sounding humming begins to get louder.)

(Pause.)

(Penny puts down the receiver.)

PENNY: Yeah, sure, boss. I gotta get out of here. My clothes are... stars, is this the same dress I wore to my interview? (she stands up) Wait, how do I get out of here? I may be fuzzy, but I know this cubicle only had three walls a minute ago.

(The humming is getting pretty loud now.)

PENNY: My arms are starting to tingle. And the walls... they don't usually glow red like that, do they? Certainly not this bright. (She runs over to the wall and starts pounding on it) Hello? Is there someone out there? Oh, it's starting to hurt! Please, let me out! It's [in agony now] **AHHH! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUAAAAAGGGHHHH----**

(The humming climaxes; she screams as she's vaporized.)

(As the humming fades back down, we hear the ambient office floor, proceeding about its day as if nothing has happened.)

SCENE 5D-02**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

DOVAN: Captain's Log, supplemental. As the saying goes, some days you get the bear, and some days the bear turns out to be a sapient lifeform who is very unhappy you chose *that* moment to make First Contact. Let's just say our survey of Kusan Three-Eight-One is over, and one day we'll get that image out of our brains, too. We are returning now to the planetoid where three of my senior staff have been touring a packaged-foods merchant as part of a good-will tour through the League of Forty Systems.

(Alert at Yubari's console.)

YUBARI: Sir, the away team missed their scheduled check-in.

DOVAN: Uh-oh. You tried raising them?

YUBARI: Yes, sir. Nothing.

DOVAN: Alright. Increase speed to warp [eight point nine.]

(Another alert on Yubari's console.)

YUBARI: Oh, for...

DOVAN: Gonna let me in on it, Commander?

YUBARI: Sir, it's a message from Lieutenant Lorhrok. He says they were hard at work on a compression analysis and lost track of time.

DOVAN: Well, whatever a compression analysis is, it sounds like he's having a good time. I just hope he gets the replicator pattern for TFK Sandwiches I asked for. Helm, reduce speed to warp five. We can take the scenic route while they finish up at Centaurus.

SYLVESTE: Aye, captain.

YUBARI: Anything else, sir?

DOVAN: What, you want me to have them flogged? They were late for a check-in, Commander. Lighten up.

SCENE 5D-03**LOCATION: OFFICE BUILDING**

(J'naya and Donna are walking.)

VANCE: (A recording on a screen) *Welcome, visitor, to your guided tour of Centaurus Foods, where we give one hundred and ten percent to our mission of Nurturing Life. As the market leader of the packaged baby food industry throughout the Forty Systems,*

DONNA: Now that's an interesting question.

J'NAYA: Aw, it's just the engineer in me. Usually, a company like this... what, thirty thousand employees? Getting everyone to and from the parking lot every day ends up being a pretty interesting challenge. Now, if you've got good public transit, maybe on-site transporters... well, my point is, I don't see any of that here. I just beamed in to your only transporter pad and you've got, what, ten parking spaces?

VANCE: (in background) *our dedicated employees spend all day, every day bringing you and your little ones Zam-Pows for breakfast, TFK for lunch, and Li'l Astroneers for dinner -- we gotta keep Centaurus on top. Please enjoy the guided tour of our Galactic Headquarters, led by a designated H.R. associate. If you'd like to join our team, an application will be provided at the end of the tour. And, please, whoever you are, wherever you're from, try to remember to use your life to nurture others'.*

DONNA: No, no, I understand completely. And I'm not being HR-polite here, it really is an interesting question. How do thirty thousand people get to their fulfilling jobs at Centaurus Foods every day? I wish I had an answer for you. It's just never been an issue.

J'NAYA: I know you want me to collect Neeva and Lieutenant Lorhrok and get out of your hair, but do you think maybe we could stop by the cubicle of that woman I talked to yesterday first? Penny? She seemed like someone who'd know her way around a transit plan.

DONNA: I don't see why not. Your shipmates have been perfect guests; we are in no rush to get rid of them. In fact, they did some redesign of our TFK production line last night, and we're already showing improved output. Marketing is trying to translate their work into new sales as we speak.

J'NAYA: Well, that's awfully nice of them. They'd been planning a date on the surface -- a night on Lake Ninakiss [nin-AH-kis] while we wait for the *Excelsior* to pick us up.

DONNA: You know what engineers are like: give them a juicy problem and there's no tearing them away from it. At Centaurus Foods, that's what we do for our engineers all day, every day.

J'NAYA: Is this whole floor engineers, then?

DONNA: Oh, no, there's a great mix here. There's a pod of marketing cubicles on your left, a sizable force of nutritionists on your right -- they work very closely with the test kitchen robots upstairs -- and of course packaging, where Penny works, just down this way.

J'NAYA: Oh, I only asked because it looks like everyone on this floor is very intent on their work. In the cubicles, under the desks... are those sleeping pods?

DONNA: You got it in one, Kestra! At Centaurus Foods, everyone knows we gotta give one hundred and ten percent to get our galactically-beloved brands out to nurture a hundred billion customers. Every once in a while, that means a few late nights at the office, and our top-of-the-line rest pods inject the correct level of melatonin, prolactin, and other hormones to ensure a completely restful sleep. They even extract bodily waste, so our employees don't have to worry about wasting hours of productivity in the bathroom every month!

J'NAYA: Wow, that's, uh, wonderful! Heh heh! And where's your office?

DONNA: I office with Humanoid Resources up on Eighteen. In fact, I'm there right now! You wouldn't have guessed this image of me is a holographic projection, would you?

J'NAYA: No, it's incredibly realistic!

(They arrive.)

DONNA: And here's Penny's cubicle now. I see she's closed up for focus. But you're an invited guest of the company, so let me just scan her status plate...

(She waves a card in front of a scanner. It beeps in a friendly way, then makes an unfriendly beep.)

DONNA: Oh, dear.

J'NAYA: What?

DONNA: I'm afraid it says here that Penny is no longer employed by Centaurus Foods. Her quarterly review was yesterday, and I suppose it didn't go well.

J'NAYA: Do you have a forwarding address? There are some, uh, packaging questions that I'd really like to discuss with her.

DONNA: I'm afraid I don't have that information. But I'd be happy to have you meet with one of our other packagers! Chapstick?

J'NAYA: No, thanks; after how dry it was yesterday, I brought my own lip balm. I just -- I really thought I hit it off with Penny. Has anyone else seen her today? Maybe she talked to them about her, uh, her next steps.

DONNA: Well, let me just check that for you. (she scans her card again, and this time it beeps the "friendly" beep sequence twice.) Huh. That's strange.

J'NAYA: What?

DONNA: It looks like Penny had one other visitor this morning -- just a few minutes after she was terminated. Must have just missed her. It was another visitor from off-campus... but there aren't any other visitors on today's schedule.

J'NAYA: Was it one of my friends, maybe coming by to look for me?

DONNA: No, no, your friends are quite busy. Besides, this man had dark skin, and his clothes don't look like yours at all. Here, take a look. Do you recognize him?

J'NAYA: No. Human enough, but... no.

DONNA: His security scan looks to be in order, so I suppose I don't have to look into it right away. Come on, your friends are just down in this pod over here...

J'NAYA: You've, uh, you've given them their own cubicles?

DONNA: They were doing so much to help! And, you know, there came a point in the middle of the night when they just couldn't help climbing into one of our sleep pods.

J'NAYA: Together?

DONNA: Oh, no no no. The pods aren't designed for that sort of, um, activity. But why don't you ask them yourself?

(Kestra gently knocks on the wall of Lorhrok's cubicle.)

J'NAYA: Hello, Leftenant Lorhrok, sir? I'm back from the shuttlecraft. The, ehm, calculations I needed to run last night went off without a hitch. Sir? Leftenant Lorhrok? (pause) Hey, Alecz!

LORHROK: Woman! Would you please stop bothering me! Can you not see that I am trying to get some work done!

J'NAYA: Yes, I was meaning to ask you about your work. The Centaurans are sure happy about it but you know you're not supposed to go around sharing the Federation's advanced industrial techniques with, well — sorry, Donna — primitive cultures! Neeva, didn't you remind Alecz about the Prime Directive?

NEEVA: (sigh) Kestra, will you please go away? I'm trying to do some good here at Centaurus.

DONNA: Alecz, Neeva, it's clear you really care about our corporate mission of Nurturing Life. I don't want to rush you, but since I'm here, have you thought about the offer of employment Centaurus has extended to you?

NEEVA: Oh, fine. If it means these infernal distractions will stop? I accept! Here. (she clicks a pen open and signs her name on a sheet of paper, then hands it back to Donna) Done. Employed. I'm an employee now. So will you please go away?

DONNA: Oh, that's wonderful news. We're so happy to have you onboard. Lieutenant Lorhrok?

LORHROK: Yes, yes, me too. Contract's signed on the desk.

DONNA: I'll return these both to Mister Vance right away! Welcome! Alright, Kestra, why don't we move away to respect the focus of Centaurus's newest employees?

J'NAYA: Uh, how about we don't? Donna, don't you see that something is really wrong here?

DONNA: I don't know what you mean! Centaurus has a special knack for attracting people who believe in our mission, and your Starfleet seems to believe very strongly in Nurturing Life.

J'NAYA: And they've dedicated their lives to Starfleet!

DONNA: I'm sorry to poach, but your former colleagues are now working on important products that nurture billions of young lives around the quadrant, and they now enjoy all the incredible amenities and generous benefits Centaurus Foods has to offer them!

J'NAYA: Like your vacation policy?

DONNA: Oh, yes, Kestra, we're given months of paid vacation every [fiscal year!]

J'NAYA: And when was the last time you took a vacation?

DONNA: I, uh... That's strange. I can't recall precisely.

J'NAYA: Donna, has anyone who works at Centaurus ever taken a vacation?

DONNA: unh. You know, I can't remember anyone ever wanting to.

J'NAYA: Uh-huh. I thought so. Donna, the *Excelsior*'s going to save you from whatever this place is doing. We're going to save you all. But we're starting with these two. Lieutenant Lohrok, I'm pulling the plug!

(She pulls a big electric cable out of a socket. Lohrok's systems all shut down.)

LORHROK: Hey!

J'NAYA: Sir, come on! Whatever that computer was doing to you, I turned it off -- and we have to get out of here!

LORHROK: Are you out of your mind?!

DONNA: Kestra! You're upsetting our employees, and preventing them from doing their job! I'm going to have to ask you to leave immediately!

J'NAYA: Oooookay, that, ehm... that did not work. Oh boy. Donna, eighteenth floor, right?

DONNA: I beg your pardon?

J'NAYA: Your office! You're on Eighteen with H.R.! I'm coming to rescue you, Donna.

(J'Naya lets go of Donna, turns, and sprints away at top speed!)

J'NAYA: I'm coming to rescue you, Donna!

DONNA: am sorry, Kestra, but you are clearly becoming a danger to yourself and others! At Centaurus Foods, we put the safety of our employees first, every time! Security drones! Deploy and detain! Neutralize if necessary! Cubicle, deactivate holo-imager.

(Donna's holo-image deactivates just as a bunch of steel panels in the walls and floors slide back, allowing a few dozen defense drones to roll out. They pursue and very quickly, in seconds, surround Kestra, who is forced to stop running.)

DRONE VOICES: Attention. You are surrounded. Desist at once.

J'NAYA: Uh... hey guys. That was some pretty good, ehm, rolling you did there. And surrounding! You're good at that, too. Are those arms all guns? Or are some of them, like, first-aid tools, maybe?

DRONE VOICES: Desist at once or you will be neutralized.

J'NAYA: I'm desisting! I'm desisting! Hands in the air and everything! I'll head back to my shuttle and fly straight off this planet.

DRONE VOICES: Surrender accepted. You will be taken to Security Cubicle Five to sign a confession and waiver of liability.

J'NAYA: Ohhhhh boy. Hey, what's this at my feet? (a soft metal "clink") Did one of you throw this at me?

(The smoke bomb suddenly detonates!)

DRONE VOICES: Alert! Alert! Targeting sensors obscured! Unable to lock!

J'NAYA: (coughing heavily) What the... a smoke bomb? Who threw a smoke bomb?

(Out of the shadows, at her side, steps... ISAAC BRAHMS.)

BRAHMS: I did. We have maybe ten seconds before they compensate. So RUN!

(He takes off!)

J'NAYA: And who the heck are you?!

(But she takes off after him anyway.)

BRAHMS: I'm the one with a way out of here! This way!

DRONE VOICES: (in background) Alert! Alert! Threat escaping! Unknown accessory! Retarget! Retarget!

(The drones start rolling after them again.)

J'NAYA: It's a dead end!

BRAHMS: Come on!

DRONE VOICES: (in background) Open fire.

(The drones open fire.)

J'NAYA: See? It's a blank wall! We're trapped!

BRAHMS: Hold on to me!

J'NAYA: No! I think I'm gonna try surrendering again!

BRAHMS: And be a corporate slave for the rest of your short life? TRUST ME!

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: Fine!

(She grabs on tight. Brahms presses a button on a device on his hand.)

BRAHMS: Here we go! (sound of exertion as he jumps through the wall, carrying J'Naya)

LOCATION: LARGE DUCT INSIDE THE WALLS

J'NAYA: What the... what just happened?

(Meanwhile, the device on Brahms's wrist is sparking and frying.)

BRAHMS: Oh, no no no no no! (he slaps his own wrist) Damn you, Beta, I know you've got one more jump in you!

(The wristband replies by sparking once more, particularly loudly, then dies completely)

J'NAYA: I repeat: whoever you are... What. Happened?

BRAHMS: Well, I just jumped us through a wall. But you won't get to see that again, because the strain of phasing both of us fried my uplink to Beta Five. We can't reach her. Stars and scions!

J'NAYA: You... you're the man who was at Penny's cubicle this morning, right after she got fired!

BRAHMS: Did you know her?

J'NAYA: Not well.

BRAHMS: Good.

J'NAYA: Why?

BRAHMS: Penny's dead.

J'NAYA: And... you know this how?

BRAHMS: I didn't kill her! I was trying to save her. Minute too late.

J'NAYA: Save her from who?

BRAHMS: That's what I'm here to find out. Pendarra Q'Lex is not the first Centaurus Foods employee to die on the job.

J'NAYA: They have two of my shipmates.

BRAHMS: Yes. Alecz Lorhrok: always needing to be rescued. I think that's why I was sent here.

J'NAYA: Just for him?

BRAHMS: I thought this was my usual penance. But now that I see him... It isn't his time. The Scions need him still, at the Beginning. (angry chuckle) And that's an even heavier penance, in its way.

J'NAYA: Why?

BRAHMS: Lorhrok took my Alex from me. And Lorhrok is the reason he's dead.

J'NAYA: "Your Alex...?" You mean Bev? Bev Rol? Who the spast are you?

BRAHMS: Isaac. You can call me Isaac.

J'NAYA: Isaac... Isaac Brahms?

BRAHMS: Not anymore, but close enough. Come on; we need to get moving.

(Brahms starts walking through the metal duct. J'naya follows.)

J'NAYA: Where?

BRAHMS: Away from here, Kestra. We jumped through a wall, but Corporate Security is probably already putting two and two together.

J'NAYA: Fair enough. And "Commander" will do. You know my name how?

BRAHMS: Do you have any... anything moisturizing? It's unspeakably dry in here. A water bottle?

J'NAYA: Just some chapstick. Here.

BRAHMS: Thank you. (he applies it) We keep tabs on the *Excelsior*, of course. You, you're the boring one.

J'NAYA: We-- Excuse me, what?

(Brahms starts climbing a ladder. J'naya follows.)

BRAHMS: You have a better description? Your only established personality trait is that you're a butterfingers.

J'NAYA: I'm... I'm... the engineering one!

BRAHMS: Eh. Not really. Kinash Adow's twice the engineer you are.

J'NAYA: (exasperated noise) My team... helps bring out her talents!

(Brahms pauses on the ladder. J'naya necessarily does the same.)

BRAHMS: (snort) So you're the middle management one? Would you like to get out of this wall right now, apply for a job at Centaurus? I'm sure you'd fit right in!

J'NAYA: I would most certainly not!

(They start climbing again.)

BRAHMS: Good! The people I work for expect the people I work with to have a certain degree of self-regard.

(He reaches the top of the ladder and steps off into another metal duct.)

J'NAYA: Unbelievable. (pause) Wait, you work for someone?

(She reaches the top and steps out too.)

BRAHMS: Have you ever heard the name "Gary Seven"?

J'NAYA: No.

BRAHMS: Then there's no point explaining. Now, which way from here?

J'NAYA: I thought you said you have the way out of here.

BRAHMS: My Beta Five uplink had the map.

J'NAYA: So you had a way out of here.

BRAHMS: We just have to get back to my transport. It's on level six east.

J'NAYA: You landed your ship inside the building?

BRAHMS: Who said anything about a ship? This way.

(He starts walking left.)

J'NAYA: Why that way?

BRAHMS: Intuition, Miss J'Naya, however illogical, is a command prerogative.

(He opens a large, person-sized metal grate, which swings open with a creak...)

LOCATION: OFFICE BUILDING

GUARD DRONES: Intruders detected! Desist and surrender!

BRAHMS: Other way! Run!

Yes, Brahms just quoted James T. Kirk.

LOCATION: LARGE DUCT INSIDE THE WALLS

(And they're off, just as the guard drones open fire on the grate.)

(The drones enter the duct and start shooting.)

VANCE: *Attention! This is Vance in H.R.! All Security converge on Level Three Section Ten!*

J'NAYA: So that's your "command prerogative," huh?

BRAHMS: I had a map, but then I rescued you!

J'NAYA: And what a rescue it's turning out to be!

BRAHMS: There! Turn left!

(Their shoes squeak as they make the turn. The robots stop firing.)

(They run a few more steps and Brahms stops next to a big fan. They're still huffing and puffing a bit.)

BRAHMS: Stand perfectly still.

J'NAYA: Next to the fan?

BRAHMS: Don't fall in. It'll chop you to pieces.

J'NAYA: It's hot.

BRAHMS: Exhaust heat for this whole side of the building. Now be quiet.

(Some of the drones reach the intersection.)

DRONE VOICES: Visual contact terminated.

VANCE: *You mean you lost them! Well... find them! Initiate search pattern!*

DRONE VOICES: In-it-i-ate!

(They all seem to head off down the corridor.)

DRONE VOICES: (in background) Scanning... searching... elevate... recalibrating... no anomalies detected...

J'NAYA: Those robots looked right at us.

BRAHMS: The security drones were built on Krakozia Center. The Krakozians evolved thousands of meters below their surface, far from starlight. They had to evolve thermal vision.

J'NAYA: ...and the exhaust fan covered our heat signature. But how did you know their robots would use thermal imaging, too?

BRAHMS: My instincts have been honed by centuries of experience.

J'NAYA: That sounds an awful lot like a lucky guess. Hang on, did you say 'centuries?' Aren't you only, like, sixty?

BRAHMS: I'm fifty-seven. We should keep moving.

J'NAYA: No, hold on. Why would they be dumping waste heat into the ventilation system? We're at almost the center of the building.

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: That's a good question. (He grabs a computer panel that's attached on a swivel to a nearby wall and twists it toward him) I stole somebody's admin password a couple days ago.

J'NAYA: Ooo, show me.

BRAHMS: Hasn't been much use, since nobody seems to know anything, but now...(a few button beeps.) This isn't an air conditioner.

J'NAYA: It's a dehumidifier. A giant, dessicant dehumidifier pumping every droplet of moisture in this place out to... where is that, actually?

(Brahms presses some keys.)

BRAHMS: It's pumped into a reservoir that... oh.

J'NAYA: What?

BRAHMS: Lake Ninakis appears to be mostly moisture from... well, from Centaurus empl--
Back! Against the wall!

(One of the drones has come back, and now starts moving calmly into the duct.)

DRONE: Execute search pattern.

J'NAYA: I thought they didn't see us!

BRAHMS: They didn't! This one's just being thorough!

J'NAYA: It's getting close! Fan or not, it'll see us in a minute!

BRAHMS: Not if it hears you first! Be quiet!

DRONE: Scanning thermal anomaly.

(A gizmo activates near the drone's eyes and he starts scanning.)

J'NAYA: Follow my lead.

BRAHMS: What?

(J'naya starts waving her arms and jumping up and down.)

J'NAYA: Hey! Over here! Ai-YIYIYIYIYIYIYI! Brahms!

BRAHMS: Cooiee! Cooooiee!

DRONE: Acquiring target.

J'NAYA: Arms! Move your arms!

(Brahms complies.)

BRAHMS: We're right here!

J'NAYA: Put on yer Sunday clothes / there's lots of world out therrrrr! [Get out the brillantine / and dime cigaaaars / We're gonna find adventure in the evening air / Girls in white in a perfumed night / Where the lights are bright as the stars!]

DRONE: Target locked. Apprehend!

(It charges.)

J'NAYA: Duck!

(They leap out of the way.)

(The robot charges straight past J'Naya and Brahms... right into the fan, which is big and fast and starts chopping the robot to bits.)

DRONE: Danger! Under attack by bladed weapons! Danger!

BRAHMS: It's caught in the fan!

J'NAYA: Yeah! Run!

DRONE: Daaaaannnnnngeer!

(The robot explodes, throwing Brahms and J'naya, who did not get far, to the ground.)

BRAHMS: Uhf!

J'NAYA: Oof!

J'naya is singing a song from "Hello Dolly"

BRAHMS: It exploded.

J'NAYA: When we started shouting and moving, it couldn't tell our limbs apart from the fan blades. It read us all as one big target.

BRAHMS: And charged right into it. How did you know?

J'NAYA: Well, I'm an engineer. I just thought, "If I were building a heat-seeking killer robot, what software bugs would I forget to fix?" and worked backwards from there.

BRAHMS: Sounds an awful lot like a lucky guess.

J'NAYA: And without even one century of experience.

BRAHMS: And the music?

J'NAYA: Oh, robots love *Hello, Dolly*. Everybody knows that.

BRAHMS: Right.

J'NAYA: Still think I'm boring?

BRAHMS: I think you're clever. But so're most middle managers. We're cut off from my transport.

J'NAYA: So where to? I have a rescue scheduled on the eighteenth floor.

BRAHMS: I'd like to circle back to Penny's cubicle first.

J'NAYA: Why? You told me she's dead.

BRAHMS: Yes, but I'd like to know what killed her; wouldn't you? This way.

(They walk off.)

SCENE 5D-98

BRAHMS: My name? Is not important. There are beings beyond your imagination who care for this galaxy. Whoever you are, wherever you are, they want to help you survive. But they can't interfere - not yet. (pause) That's why they sent me.

BRAHMS: *Assignment: Universe* - An *Assignment: Earth* Fan Production. (pause) Starring Julian Bane as Agent Isaac.

J'NAYA: And Jacqueline Lucca as Kestra J'Naya!

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: With Thomas Barnes

TRASSA: And Chris Bainbridge

BETA FIVE: Featuring Lulu Hartgen as the Beta Five.

NARRATOR: *Assignment: Universe presents "Nurturing Life." By James Heaney.*

SCENE 5D-04**LOCATION: OFFICE CUBICLE**

(Brahms is using his Gary Seven servo on what is presumably the door of the cube.)

BRAHMS: Just need another minute here.

J'NAYA: I believed you the first three times. Oh, hello!

(Someone is walking toward them.)

RANDOM OFFICE WORKER #1: Hello.

J'NAYA: We're just up from Maintenance to try and [replace some of Penny's equipment now that she's... y'know.]

Interrupted. The person walking by stopped to listen, but now holds up a hand.

RANDOM OFFICER WORKER #1: I'm sorry, I don't really have time to chat. (she starts walking away) I've got lives to nurture and need to give 'em a hundred'n'ten percent right now!

J'NAYA: Oh, yeah! Yeah. Definitely.

BRAHMS: Toodles.

J'NAYA: It's nice that everyone here is too brainwashed to be suspicious of us. You want me to try breaking the seal?

BRAHMS: Not if you're going to drop my servo again.

J'NAYA: (frustrated noise) How did you know Penny was in danger? Before, I mean?

BRAHMS: I picked up an energy spike. I've been here a week, seen it happen a few times. But I only figured out this morning what it meant.

J'NAYA: That someone's dying.

BRAHMS: Too late for Penny.

J'NAYA: Her body isn't still going to be in this cubicle, is it?

BRAHMS: Only if we're lucky. It might tell us something. Why did you trust her?

J'NAYA: Oh, I don't know. On the surface, she was as conditioned as the rest of them. "Using my life to nurture others" and too many smiles. But there was something... else. Sometimes she'd answer questions and actually seemed to hear herself, that it didn't make sense. Just for a moment. (pause) Maybe they let up on the brainwashing because they knew they were going to kill her.

BRAHMS: Or maybe they killed her because the brainwashing stopped working. Ah, here it is.

(The door/wall finally opens.)

J'NAYA: You don't have a clue how you opened that seal, do you?

BRAHMS: Centuries of experience, Commander.

J'NAYA: Yeah, how's that work, Isaac Brahms? You're fifty-seven.

BRAHMS: And the bluegill who lives in my head is a little older than that. And [the Scions of the Stars older still.]

J'NAYA: You have a neural parasite?

BRAHMS: How about I study the crime scene while you talk to him? Pseudo, come out and explain.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Ah, so you're the new Chief Engineer. Young thing. Tell me, how is Chief Adow these days?

J'NAYA: Brahms? Your voice...

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Isaac's inside, young thing. It's my body for the moment. I used to work for Adow, you know.

J'NAYA: Ensign Adow is thriving, Mister...

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Call me Psuedo. I tried to kill her with the log recorder bomb. Duty roster meant it was T'Kala instead. Too bad.

J'NAYA: You've taken over Brahms's body.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Oh, only temporarily. His Beetlejuice injection makes sure he's in charge. But there was plenty of space for me to settle in after Gevinon. There wasn't much of him left once the Three Kings were finished, you know. If it weren't for me, he'd be dead.

BRAHMS: And vice-versa, old mole. Commander, scan right here, next to the entrance.

J'NAYA: Brahms?

BRAHMS: The entrance, Commander.

(J'naya does so, using her tricorder.)

J'NAYA: Traces of... Traces of Penny. She was vaporized.

BRAHMS: Just inside the door. Struggling somehow, if I'm reading this right. She saw her attacker.

J'NAYA: Shot her on the way out of the cube to visit the w.c.?

BRAHMS: No, the angle's wrong. Besides, I've been here a week and never seen a Centaurus employee take a bathroom break. Those pods of theirs...

J'NAYA: But if she was avoiding a shot from behind, the angle's wrong for that, too.

BRAHMS: Let's take a look at her desk. Any personal effects we can find.

(Kestra closes the tricorder, steps over, picks up a large stack of papers, and starts leafing through them.)

J'NAYA: Hey, this is interesting.

BRAHMS: Hm?

J'NAYA: Looks like Penny was working on a new package for their snack cakes. It would've been a lot cheaper to manufacture. And it looks like she nearly had it...

(J'naya sits down at the desk chair, grabs a pencil, and starts audibly drawing lines.)

BRAHMS: So what? She tried to grow Centuarus's bottom line. Good employee, move on. Commander, what are you doing?

J'NAYA: It's her legacy, Brahms. And she was really, really... [close] Shoot, that's not it.

(She tears off a piece of paper, crumples it up, and throws it away.)

BRAHMS: Commander, you...

(Suddenly, the walls start to hum a little.)

BRAHMS: Oh. How interesting.

(He pulls out his servo and scans the wall.)

J'NAYA: I know! I could use your help!

BRAHMS: Yes... you could.

J'NAYA: (frustrated growl) Grah, that's not it, either!

(She tears off another piece of paper and hurls it in the trash can.)

BRAHMS: Commander, how much effort would you say you're giving Centaurus right now?

J'NAYA: Oh, a hundred and ten... ..percent. But... but that's okay. It's Penny's... Penny's legacy, and it's really a very important, uh...

(Brahms grabs the sides of her chair.)

BRAHMS: Kestra! It's not a gas, or a narcotic. It's the cubicle itself. You step inside and you want to work--because whatever machinery is inside these walls makes you.

J'NAYA: But if I can just... if you'll just... if I finish this one [thing]...

(Brahms slaps her. Hard. J'naya gasps.)

BRAHMS: Get up, Lieutenant Commander Kestra J'Naya of the *U.S.S. Excelsior*. Remember who you are and get up.

J'NAYA: The, the, the... the... (chuckle) Heh. The boring one.

(The humming starts to get a little louder and more intense.)

BRAHMS: Welcome back, Commander. Now we know how Penny lived: her corporate masters turned her into a brainwashed slave to generate more profit. But we still don't know why she died. I suggest you stand outside the cubicle while I finish my scans.

J'NAYA: That seems like... a good idea. And Brahms?

BRAHMS: Isaac, please.

J'NAYA: Isaac. Thanks.

(He doesn't stop scanning.)

BRAHMS: I exterminated nine thousand five hundred and eighty-five completely innocent people on New Victoria for what turned out to be a mistake. They were not the first. I am expected to balance the books.

J'NAYA: I'm still grateful, Isaac. Oh. I think I just figured out how Penny died.

(He does stop scanning.)

BRAHMS: What? How?

J'NAYA: There used to be a way out of this cubicle, didn't there?

(Brahms runs to where the exit USED TO BE.)

BRAHMS: What!

(The humming gets even louder.)

J'NAYA: And did you notice that humming sound? The louder it gets, the more tingly I'm feeling.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: The walls are glowing, too. A lovely pink.

BRAHMS: Get out of here, Pseudo! I need the body!

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: Okay, okay, just wondering if you'd noticed.

J'NAYA: He's right, though.

BRAHMS: I know he's right. I don't understand. My servo is Scion; it should be able to open any mechanical lock. There are no seams I can find. It's not a locked door; it's a new wall.

J'NAYA: Got anything that can blast through it?

BRAHMS: I'm not allowed weapons. You?

J'NAYA: Confiscated at the front door. This is starting to hurt, Isaac.

BRAHMS: Me too. The wall's glowing brighter.

J'NAYA: Try climbing over it. I'll give you a boost.

BRAHMS: Agreed. Ready?

J'NAYA: Hee-yup!

(Brahms hits an electrified field.)

BRAHMS: AHHH!

(Brahms flies backward and strikes that ground hard, parts of his skin smoldering.)

J'NAYA: Okay, don't touch the cube walls, then. Isaac, you think you can hoist me over the wall without touching?

(Brahms groans)

J'NAYA: Oh...kay, that sounds like a no. Ow ow ow! (she slaps her own forearms.)

C'mon, Kestra, you can do this, you improvised a transporter in a junkyard... course, you had all night and a team of six for that... What do we have to work with? Papers, desk console, keyboard, horrifying dystopian sleeping pod thingy, carpet. Busted uplink, working servo. How much time? (shudders) Judging by how red the walls are and how much that hurts... not much. And who's my team? Isaac? Pseudo? (silence) I hope he's not dead. They're not dead? Right. Okay. Donna said the sleeping pod extracts solid waste, which means (she steps over, crouches down, presses some buttons, and opens a maintenance panel on the pod) it probably has a low-powered dematerializer built-in. Of course, that'll have a million safeties, so it doesn't vaporize your nethers by accident, but, uh (she yanks out a bunch of cables, which snap as they break, some of them sparking) not anymore. So now I have a... (she presses a button and we hear something like a replicator.) ...dematerializer beam so weak you might not notice the bald spot in your carpet. AHHG! Geeze! The cubicle's going to dematerialize me a long time before this thing... hang on. (she grabs Brahm's servo and gets to work) The whole room is flowing with power. Power being used to vaporize me and Isaac. If I can just harness some of that with this... use that to juice up the demat beam... Ha! Stand back, everybody! (she presses the button and the dematerializer ROARS to life, making the same sound but sounding way more massive.) NICE. That brand new hole in the wall is our exit. Isaac!

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: Give us a moment. I'm still putting the inside of his head back together.

J'NAYA: Why? You're a bluegill. I thought you'd take his body and let him die.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: What, all bluegills are evil?

J'NAYA: You are. You're the one who tried to kill Doctor Sharp and infest the *Excelsior*, aren't you?

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: So you heard of me, young thing! How flattering.

J'NAYA: That's not an answer.

BRAHMS: (deep gasp) Enough chit-chat. Let's get out of here.

(They exit and start making tracks away from Penny's cubicle.)

J'NAYA: Isaac. You're alright?

BRAHMS: Well enough. We're still on, uh... Draylax Beta?

J'NAYA: No, the Centaurus Food corporation.

BRAHMS: Oh, yes. "Nurturing Life" and all that.

J'NAYA: Draylax is almost a hundred thousand light-years away.

BRAHMS: That was a very interesting thing you did a minute ago.

J'NAYA: You mean how I saved your bacon?

BRAHMS: No, I would've figured something out.

J'NAYA: You think so, huh.

BRAHMS: I thought it was interesting that you didn't drop anything. In fact, your hands didn't shake at all.

J'NAYA: You didn't have the first inkling of a plan back there, did you?

BRAHMS: None whatsoever. Exciting, isn't it, Commander?

J'NAYA: It's certainly less boring than another day in Engineering! You're not how I expected you to be. From the stories, I mean.

BRAHMS: Commander, I died.

J'NAYA: So now you offer mentorship? And tell jokes?

BRAHMS: Most of your shipmates met me during the worst days of my life. When my Alex and I were young operatives, doing the good work... well, he wasn't the only one with a cheerful smirk. Also, Commander, I died.

J'NAYA: Y'know, Isaac? I think I'm okay with "Kestra."

BRAHMS: You saved my bacon back there, Kestra. Thank-you. (The elevator dings) Now let's get upstairs and save Donna's.

(They enter the elevator.)

(Brahms hits a button and the elevator starts moving.)

J'NAYA: I just can't believe Centarus's leaders did all this for money.

(The elevator starts dinging floors.)

BRAHMS: Quite frankly, I can't, either. I've seen it before, greed, but never understood it.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: Neither of you has ever been poor.

BRAHMS: What are you talking about?

J'NAYA: You were a king among the bluegills.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: A king. (Pfft.) Eight hundredth of my brood, trapped in the swirling, crawling darkness of the nutrient pits, desperately fighting topside to hope for a chance -- one chance -- to win a host the only way the lowborn can. In battle. You can't know the longing. I did far worse than this for far less reward.

J'NAYA: Well, yeah, but you're... you know... evil.

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: Oh yes, I forgot. That explains everything, then.

BRAHMS: Quiet down, you two. Hopefully the drones are still looking for us at Penny's cubicle, but security is going to be tighter up here.

(The elevator dings and the doors open.)

LOCATION: CENTAURUS FOODS - EIGHTEENTH FLOOR

VANCE: (in background) *[Happy Monday, Centaurus employees! This is V.P. of Humanoid Resources] Silas Vance, asking you to always give a hundred ten percent. To fulfill our mission of Nurturing Life, we gotta keep Centaurus on top!* (this repeats throughout the scene)

J'NAYA: Don't you ever find your head a little... crowded, Isaac? Two voices?

BRAHMS: (chuckles warmly) You haven't even met Triassa. Is this the H.R. department?

J'NAYA: No, this is Logistics. That's H.R., across the hall.

BRAHMS: Ah. ...And I believe that's Donna there.

J'NAYA: She looks absorbed in her work.

BRAHMS: The walls of her cubicle. Do you see it? Pulsing just a faaaaint pink.

J'NAYA: I mean, now that we know what to look for... aren't they all?

BRAHMS: Remarkable. You're right.

(Kestra approaches the cube in question.)

J'NAYA: Donna?

(Donna turns around in her swivel chair.)

DONNA: Kestra? So you decided to join your friends at Centaurus after all? Welcome to the team!

J'NAYA: Uh...yeah, that's what happened. Those security robots shot at me and that's when I decided this was the place I wanted to work, sure, look, can we talk?

DONNA: Of course! Onboarding is a rewarding but challenging process, and I'm delighted to help you through it!

J'NAYA: No, I meant... it's lunch time, right? And you showed me Centaurus's great big empty cafeteria on the tour, so...

DONNA: I'm sorry, Kestra! I'm having a little bit of a working lunch today. Giving my break to nurture others!

J'NAYA: Yeah, but, like... it's really important. Can we just step outside your cube for a second?

DONNA: How about I just activate privacy on this cube?

J'NAYA: No no no! That won't be, um, necessary. Isaac?

DONNA: Who's this?

J'NAYA: Oh, he's my, um, assistant. From Maintenance.

BRAHMS: Assistant.

J'NAYA: Fine, Companion, if you like. He's just doing some... some maintenance on your cubicle while we talk. Outside.

DONNA: Maybe after I'm finished here.

BRAHMS: Kestra, take a look at this.

J'NAYA: I'll be right back, Donna.

DONNA: Mmm-hmm.

(J'Naya exits the cubicle)

J'NAYA: Hey.

(Brahms is scanning with his servo.)

BRAHMS: I was looking for the cubicle's power core.

J'NAYA: Makes sense; pull the plug, Donna's mind control wears off. But I killed the electricity in First Officer Lorhrok's cube and it didn't do a thing.

BRAHMS: That's because there isn't a power core. There's a heart.

J'NAYA: A what now?

BRAHMS: An actual beating heart. With blood. Right, uh... here within the walls of the cubicle. Scan it yourself. (Kestra pulls out her tricorder and scans it) Whoever built these mind control cubicles used biological components instead of mechanical ones.

J'NAYA: It's alive?

BRAHMS: To some extent, at least. These aren't cubicles. They're mouths.

J'NAYA: They're just disguised. And when that wall suddenly appeared in Penny's cube...

BRAHMS: That was the mouth closing. But that's not the interesting part. Tell Donna to come out here with you.

J'NAYA: Donna, it will just take a minute.

DONNA: Anything you can say to me out there you can say in here, Kestra.

(J'Naya's tricorder beeps some alerts.)

J'NAYA: Whoa, what is that? Chlorine gas?

BRAHMS: Every time you said something that pushed against Donna's brainwashing, the cubicle... surged to reinforce her brainwashing. It seems the byproduct of mind control is chlorine gas. Of course, the cubicle has membranes that quickly re-absorb it, but...

(Donna's phone rings. She picks it up.)

J'NAYA: Wow. Explains the giant dehumidifier, doesn't it?

DONNA: (way in background)
Hello? (pause) Speaking.

BRAHMS: Yes, it does.

DONNA: Mister Brahms?

BRAHMS: How do you know that name?

DONNA: The phone. It's for you.

BRAHMS: Alright?

(She hands Brahms the phone.)

BRAHMS: Um... Hello?

VANCE: *Silas Vance, Humanoid Resources, you probably saw my video. I'd like a word.*

BRAHMS: Great. My calendar's up-to-date and I'm free Thursday morning. Just one question: how long do you have to stall us here before your drones arrive?

VANCE: *Hmph. You think I'd call before they got here? Alpha, go.*

(A whole bunch of security drones roll out.)

J'NAYA: Drones!

BRAHMS: Kestra, run!

(She turns to run, maybe gets a few steps.)

VANCE: *Oh, I wouldn't. Beta, go.*

(A whole bunch MORE security drones roll out.)

J'NAYA: We're surrounded.

VANCE: *There we go. Let's talk face-to-face. My projection will be there...* (his hologram appears in real life) Now! Hello! We've been watching you for a while. Trying to figure out exactly who you are... Isaac Brahms. Is that a species or a personal name?

BRAHMS: It's a dead name.

VANCE: Oh, well, no matter. We've got every corporate librarian on it, and I'm sure you've noticed how motivated our Centaurus employees are. Personally, I think you're The Agent.

BRAHMS: (snorts) "The Agent." You think there's only one?

VANCE: Of your importance? Yes. You didn't imagine your actions on Errikang had gone unnoticed, did you?

BRAHMS: By you? Yes. In the end, that was all just one man with a vision. And a robot army. And a very warped idea of courtship. Anyway, it was on the other side of the galaxy. Not where I expected a baby food company to train its all-seeing eye.

VANCE: You'll come with the robots now.

BRAHMS: Or?

VANCE: Or they'll shoot you and figure out what we want to know at the autopsy.

(Brahms starts walking. Kestra immediately follows suit. The security drones clatter along ominously behind them.)

BRAHMS: We'll come with the robots.

VANCE: Good boy. The rest of the Board of Directors wants to meet you.

BRAHMS: Oh, why didn't you say so? That's where we were headed anyway.

(They walk down a corridor for a minute.)

VANCE: You never had a chance, you know.

J'NAYA: How do you mean?

VANCE: The cubicle never would have let Donna step outside. Not for a moment.

J'NAYA: You knew about the brainwashing.

VANCE: (snort) I wouldn't be very good at running H.R. if I didn't.

J'NAYA: You've destroyed all these people. For money?

VANCE: Destroyed them? No, we saved our employees. Before finding Centaurus, they lived cheap, tawdry lives without purpose. We gave them one.

BRAHMS: They had lives. Hobbies. Families.

VANCE: Exactly! Pointless frippery! They spent their so-called "lives" watching big-budget holovids, then had two-point-one children apiece so that, a hundred years from now, someone will still be watching big-budget holovids. At Centaurus Foods, they've become part of something beautiful and life-giving. We've made advances in sustainable farming that have saved entire worlds from famine. Our factories employ thousands at wages that lift whole communities out of poverty. And we do it all while selling some of the most popular brands in the quadrant. An employee here isn't putting food in two or three mouths; he feeds billions. Right through here, Isaac Brahms.

(Vance arrives at a large, very pair of wooden double doors and knocks ceremoniously. After a moment, the doors swing open.)

(They enter.)

LOCATION: CENTAURUS FOODS - BOARD ROOM

(The doors close behind them.)

(Vance's hologram vanishes.)

VANCE: Centaurus Directors, I present you with Isaac Brahms, and... hm. Truthfully, I've forgotten your name because you don't matter. What was it, again? For protocol.

J'NAYA: Oh, I'm just Kestra. An engineer. The boring one.

DIRECTOR #2: Welcome to Centaurus Foods, Isaac Brahms.

BRAHMS: Very nice wood paneling in here, Director.

DIRECTOR #1: Thank you. We strive for dignity in this room.

J'NAYA: Those computer consoles over there kinda ruin the decor, though, don't they?

DIRECTOR #3: At a certain point, Miss, form must give way to function.

DIRECTOR #1: The Board of Directors must be able to see and control everything in the building from here. Now, Mister Vance is aware of our questions.

DIRECTOR #2: Proceed, Mister Vance.

VANCE: Thank you, Directors. Brahms. What are you?

BRAHMS: Human.

VANCE: We considered that. But your internal organs are completely wrong for a human. And then you walked through a wall.

BRAHMS: I had a device.

VANCE: Centuries beyond human technology.

BRAHMS: Fine. What do you think I am?

VANCE: Your parasite made us think you're a Zero. But they're nowhere near that technology, either. Or did you steal it, perhaps?

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: Like you know anything about the Zero. Centaurus Foods is a minor megacorp in the League of Forty Systems, a bargain-basement regional alliance that makes the Perenalthorias look like a superpower!

BRAHMS: Be quiet, Pseudo!

VANCE: Oh, now, that is new! (he chuckles)

(Director #1, Director #2, and Director #3 all laugh.)

DIRECTOR #1: Symbiosis?

DIRECTOR #2: Some kind of Trill?

BRAHMS: I prefer not to interfere. Shut down the cubicles, close the corporation, and I'll let the four of you escape.

(A faint hum starts up.)

VANCE: Close Centaurus Foods?

J'NAYA: Isaac. Look.

BRAHMS: Ah. Well spotted, Kestra. Yes... that makes sense.

DIRECTOR #3: Ehm, who is escaping where, exactly?

(Brahms starts walking.)

BRAHMS: That's right, Directors. Let us leave and we'll pardon the criminals behind this. (The faint hum gets a little more audible) Only you're not the ones behind this, are you, Directors? You're just the figureheads.

VANCE: I take exception to that!

BRAHMS: I should have realized as soon as I found out they were biological. The cubicles aren't machines; they're alive. They aren't just alive; they're sapient. Which means I finally know their weakness.

VANCE: Can you hear yourself?

BRAHMS: Look at the walls, Vance. Open your ears. The same red glow, the same hum. Of course you take exception. That's what this room brainwashed you to do. It's not just sapient; this boardroom is running the company. (pause) But what's every sapient creature's weakness? Easy: threats! And here I am right next to this creature's heart.

(Brahms whips out his servo turns it on high, and jams it up against the wall.)

BRAHMS: No one move! This is a deadly laser weapon. And if I so much as feel the idea of mind control brush up against my thoughts, I'll set it off right into your boss's guts.

VANCE: The Agent doesn't kill.

BRAHMS: When The Agent kills, he doesn't leave survivors to talk about it. It's really very nice wood paneling. What's it signify? Rank?

DIRECTOR #1: Age. Although rank is really the same thing.

BRAHMS: I don't want to talk to some lackey, Boardroom. By the terms of the Po'Genai [poe jen-eye] Proclamation, I demand you address me directly.

DIRECTOR #2, DIRECTOR #1, AND VANCE (BOARDROOM): I | already | am.

BRAHMS: What race are you? Shapeshifters?

(Brahms turns off the servo.)

VANCE (BOARDROOM): Of a sort. You won't have heard of us. My race enhances complex thought patterns -- and feeds on them. Every three million years, we return from this galaxy to our nesting place in the Great Void, there to sleep and dream and birth for another million. The new generation returns to explore anew, guided by the few surviving mothers.

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): But we awoke from our aeon of slumber this cycle to find the way was shut.

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): An energy barrier blocked us from the galaxy.

(Brahms starts to walk toward the middle of the room.)

BRAHMS: The Galactic Barrier.

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): Cruel.

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): Hateful.

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): Doom.

VANCE (BOARDROOM): My children starved. The other mothers sacrificed themselves. Finally, we found a way through, but too late. No time to forage, no others to help... until we found this company. And all the thousands of lower life-forms scurrying around Centaurus every day, trying to spin hours into gold.

BRAHMS: So you turned Centaurus into a cattle farm. Your children morphed into those thousands of cubicles, feasting on complex thoughts, slaughtering when the time is ripe, consuming innocents like Penny as food.

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): Yes.

BRAHMS: So the people who work here really are "nurturing life." The lives of your children.

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): Yes.

BRAHMS: Let me help.

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): Yes.

BRAHMS: There are resources at my command... part of me created the Barrier... we'll find a solution without enslaving anyone.

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): No.

BRAHMS: I'm offering a way out for you and your children.

VANCE: We have something else in mind. Yes, me again, Silas Vance. You'll notice you've walked back to the table, Agent, turned off your laser device -- is it really even a weapon? --

BRAHMS: No.

VANCE: And you're suddenly very cooperative with your answers, too. She's inside your head. Soon you'll tell Her whom you work for and where we can find them. After what you went through with the children, did you really think you could stand up to the mind control powers of an adult? (he places a piece of paper on the table) Here's your employment contract. Take as long as you like before you sign. No one's ever been able to fight longer than twenty-two minutes. That was me, actually. Before She helped me to realize my life's true purpose: to nurture the lives of Her children, until I am no longer productive and am blessed to be consumed. I look forward to having you on the team!

BRAHMS: Don't do this. You have to tell your children to stop, too. It's almost too late.

DIRECTOR #1, DIRECTOR #2, and DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): Indeed. | Too late | for you.

VANCE: Blocking Her out is hurting you, I can see that. Why not give in? Thinking's not such a hard habit to break. Let Her rush into you and wash the rest away.

BRAHMS: I... don't want to hurt you... You've been through... so much.

VANCE: Brahms, you're not hurting anyone. You can't even move.

BRAHMS: No... but... Kestra... .. can.

VANCE: Kestra? The... the girl?

(Vance spins around.)

(Kestra is walking toward them from the far side of the room.)

J'NAYA: Gosh, you tell everybody you're boring and leave them in a room with Isaac and it's like you put up a personal cloaking field. Every ounce of attention goes to him. All your talking, alllll your spooky mind control... and, especially... all your eyeballs.

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): He represents a superior form of life.

BRAHMS: (laughs) I'm the very worst of three species. But there... in Kestra J'Naya... you're looking at one of the best.

VANCE: As it happens, Miss... J'Naya, we have a contract ready for you, too.

J'NAYA: I really wouldn't bother with the mind control stuff. You haven't got the time.

VANCE: On the contrary, Miss, we have all the time in the world. If you're counting on your grand starship to rescue you...

BRAHMS: She's not. Your digestive process, your mind control. It produces chlorine gas.

J'NAYA: And your bodies know how to handle chlorine gas. It stays inside. No problem. But combine chlorine gas with water and what have you got? No chemistry majors here? You all did B-school? Okay, well, you've got hydrochloric acid. And it's all over your boss's insides. And I'm willing to bet she doesn't have a clue how to deal with that.

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): I am perfectly capable of handling a little acid.

J'NAYA: Oh, good. Then you won't mind that I put your building's giant dehumidifier in reverse and overloaded the switches.

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): WHAT?!

J'NAYA: The computers were in the corner over there. Isaac showed me the password when we were in the ducts. All he had to do was distract you. We're bringing up every droplet in Lake Ninahkiss; it's gonna be like an April shower in here. If you don't stop that mind control and clear out your chlorine gas right now -- and, yeah, I can feel you starting to control me, too -- your insides and the insides of every active mind controller in the building will be acid rain any time now. Of course, I hear you know how to handle a little acid, so no worries, right? But, if that's so... why have a giant dehumidifier at all?

(Pause.)

VANCE: My master asks... What. are. your. terms?

J'NAYA: Oh, Isaac gave you a chance to negotiate a nice, chummy deal. But, y'know, I liked Penny. So my terms are unconditional surrender. Although you might wanna release Isaac now? For your own sake? My cheeks are startin' to feel a bit damp.

(Brahms collapses to the table, gasping)

J'NAYA: And you'll need to let go of the Board here, too.

(Pause)

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): I can't do that.

J'NAYA: You don't have much choice. I'm not negotiating here; I overloaded the dehumidifier's switches. Even if I wanted to stop it, that water's coming. You stop using your power, or it's going to cook your innards.

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): My employees, they'll...

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): They'll kill me.

J'NAYA: No, no, we'll, ehm...

BRAHMS: She's right. All Centaurus's employees - all thirty thousand of them - are about to wake up and find their lives stolen, their families gone, years wasted... primed for a riot. We'll stop them, but not before a lot of her children die. Maybe her, too.

DIRECTOR #1, DIRECTOR #2, DIRECTOR #3, AND VANCE (BOARDROOM):
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

VANCE: It's begun. Acid is starting to form within the walls. Humidity still rising.

J'NAYA: Then stop using your power!

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): No, there's only one choice left. One chance to save them.

J'NAYA: We'll figure something out, but we can't do that if you're already dead!

BRAHMS: Kestra...

DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM): Help my children, Isaac Brahms. You'll help my children or I'll extinguish your mind with my dying thought.

BRAHMS: Of course I'll help.

VANCE (BOARDROOM): SWEAR IT!

BRAHMS: I swear.

(The hum of the Boardroom's power begins to build, slowly.)

DIRECTOR #2 (BOARDROOM): One last surge of my power, then. AH!

J'NAYA: A surge? That'd catalyze the rest of the acid in seconds! You'll die!

BRAHMS: To save her children, Kestra? What mother wouldn't?

DIRECTOR #1 (BOARDROOM): I learned this trick from your people, Agent. I wonder: do they themselves remember it?

BRAHMS: You mean humans?

VANCE (BOARDROOM): I mean the Tkon Imperials. They would have made marvelous slaves. Here it comes.

(Sparks fly, lightbulbs explode, the room surges with the red energy of the Room.)

VANCE, DIRECTOR #1, DIRECTOR #2, and DIRECTOR #3 (BOARDROOM):
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

(the Room dies, leaving the real directors and the real Vance behind - they all start coughing)

J'NAYA: The light in the walls... it's out. She's dead.

BRAHMS: Yes.

J'NAYA: What did she do?

BRAHMS: A final suggestion, implanted in the minds of everyone in the building. Think of the cubicle we fought.

J'NAYA: Okay.

BRAHMS: It tried to eat us. And it did eat Penny. Are you afraid? Disgusted?

J'NAYA: No, I'm... fond of it! Protective. That doesn't sound right.

BRAHMS: The cubicles have to stop using their mind control because of the acid. But this will make everyone friendly to them. Keep them safe. At least until it wears off in a few hours. We need to get going.

(Brahms starts walking toward the door.)

DIRECTOR #1: Wait. Where... how did I get here?

DIRECTOR #3: Who are you?

DIRECTOR #2: I was here to offer Centaurus a buyout.

BRAHMS: You're in charge of Centaurus, for now. I hope you're up to it. You can keep the suits, but if I were you I'd start looking for another job. Vance!

VANCE: I didn't fight hard enough.

J'NAYA: You fought longer and harder than anyone else. I only met you five seconds ago, Silas, but that tells me everything I need to know.

BRAHMS: Take charge of these men. (Brahms starts walking away; Kestra follows) See that they act... rightly.

VANCE: Where are you going?

BRAHMS: (he pauses to answer) Not much time to save those children. So. To my transport.

J'NAYA: Neeva and Lorhrok first. You can wait a couple minutes, Isaac.

BRAHMS: To Neeva and Lorhrok, then.

(They walk back out the big door.)

LOCATION: CENTAURUS FOODS - EIGHTEENTH FLOOR

J'NAYA: What did he mean, calling you a Tkonian?

Another Kirk quote from Brahms!

(J'Naya presses the elevator call button. The door immediately dings and opens, so Brahms and Kestra load in.)

BRAHMS: There is one race. But four names. The Tkonians, or Tkon, were first - it means "Children of the Stars." When we rose again, we were Iconians, or Icon - "Brethren of the Stars." But then came the Exile, the retreat from our own galaxy to wage the ancient war. There we became the Scions - "Inheritors of the Stars."

J'NAYA: That's all fine, Isaac, but you're not a Tkon or a Scion or whatever.

TRASSA: No. But his is not my only voice.

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: Okay. I am reacting with equanimity. Isaac now has three voices, but I am choosing to be calm. (clears throat) You must be Triassa?

TRASSA: How is this known?

J'NAYA: Isaac mentioned you.

TRASSA: Ah. Isaac speaks out of turn... as is his wont. I was riding another host on Draylax for most of the day.

J'NAYA: So... you're Isaac's master?

TRASSA: (chuckles) Ha ha ha, no, Kestra J'Naya of the Starship *Visionary*. I am merely a fellow penitent.

J'NAYA: Starship *Excelsior*. I don't think they've actually started building the *Visionary* yet. Next year, supposedly, if they find the budget.

TRASSA: Of course.

J'NAYA: Isaac said your people have four names. But he only gave three.

TRASSA: Isaac would do well to remember the occurrences that followed after the Beacon was subverted to direct the *Excelsior* to the Jathlin Arm.

BRAHMS: I do "remember." It went just as I promised.

TRASSA: It nearly befell that the Mapstone should be controlled by the Zero.

BRAHMS: But it didn't. We gambled and won. If the Scions keep every secret, their grand "Beginning" is going to have a pretty quick end! The Lyonians are coming.

TRASSA: There will be silence.

BRAHMS: Good day, Triassa.

TRASSA: There is no intention of leav[ing at this time.]

BRAHMS: Good day, Triassa. (he exhales)

PSUEDO-ERMEZ: And they wonder why there was a rebellion...

BRAHMS: The Scion didn't make the One exterminate anybody. But I see your point.

(The elevator door opens. They step out. Elevator closes behind them.)

LOCATION: OFFICE BUILDING

(J'Naya and Brahms start walking.)

J'NAYA: Where will you go next?

BRAHMS: Wherever I'm needed. (pause) I need an engineer.

J'NAYA: I... Is that an invitation?

BRAHMS: I used to have the finest crew in the galaxy, Kestra. I don't say that out of some vestigial sentimentality; it is simply a fact. Without them, I...

(They stop walking.)

J'NAYA: Yes?

BRAHMS: It turns out I need my crew more than I need my memories. You have great potential, Kestra. Come with me, and we'll shape it, together.

J'NAYA: What, just up and leave my job?

The Zero were once called "The One."

BRAHMS: Tell your shipmates you're accepting an ambassadorial post with the Scions of the Stars. The Federation Council won't dare say "no," and it has the virtue of being true. I promise there's never a boring day.

(Beat.)

J'NAYA: That's the problem, though. I'm the Boring One.

BRAHMS: You can be so much more than that.

J'NAYA: Why would I want to be? (pause) I went on a bad date the other night.

BRAHMS: What?

J'NAYA: Awful. One of those dates that makes you doubt that men are even capable of caring about women, y'know? Well, no, I guess you probably don't. But he got up a few minutes into dinner to hit on another woman. And by that point I was grateful!

BRAHMS: I'm not asking you on a date.

J'NAYA: Ha! No! I, uh... although, actually that's not a bad line. "I can show you the galaxy." But when's the last time you were on a date, Isaac Brahms? Even a bad one? When's the last time you got back to your room and baked a soufflé, just because? When's the last time you met somebody and your first thought wasn't, "How can I put her to good use?" In that hollowed-out head of yours, do you even remember?

BRAHMS: Kestra...

J'NAYA: You tried so hard to save all these people from Vance, but, right then, you sounded exactly like him. It's the boring days, Isaac, the frippery... that makes us human.

BRAHMS: Very well. (he starts walking again) Yes, very well.

J'NAYA: Isaac...

BRAHMS: I think those are your friends there.

(They walk a few more steps to some cubicles.)

J'NAYA: Commander? Lieutenant?

LORHROK: Kestra? Is it, uh, morning already? Blech, I need an iced *raktajino* and a sonic shower.

J'NAYA: I'm afraid it's been quite a day, sir. Do you remember anything strange?

LORHROK: Strange?

J'NAYA: Like resigning your Starfleet commission to work here forever?

LORHROK: Resigning my-- Oh, spast, I do remember that. What [did this place do to me, Commander?]

J'NAYA: It's okay. I've sorted it out. With a little help from a friend.

(Lorhrok stands from his desk chair and steps out.)

LORHROK: Friend? Did the *Excelsior* get here ear-- Brahms!

BRAHMS: You must be Mister Lorchrok. You've done so much to me, it's strange to think we've never met.

LORHROK: What are you playing at, Brahms? I arrested you!

BRAHMS: But the report said Commander Masterson...

LORHROK: She was there, but I was the one... What do you care what the report says? Don't you remember the hatred in my eyes? In yours?

(Pause.)

BRAHMS: Lieutenant, do you remember Alex Rol's voice?

LORHROK: Every day.

BRAHMS: I can't. His face is in the files. But that's all. His voice, his laugh, gone. The last thing he ever said to me -- no one else was there at the end, in that garden, and I can't remember any of it. I'll never know how he saved me. (pause) Because you got him killed. So you will forgive me if I'm not worried about forgetting some half-cooked junior officer who fancies himself my nemesis.

LORHROK: The Scions should have rescued Simon, not you! He was just a boy!

BRAHMS: I know that!

J'NAYA: Uh, Neeva?

NEEVA: I'm alright. Just... didn't think I should interrupt. So you're Isaac Brahms?

BRAHMS: I'm really not. If that's all, Commander, I'll get back to my ship.

(He walks away.)

J'NAYA: No... Isaac... I need a sec. Be right back.

(She follows him, catching up quickly. Brahms presses the elevator call button.)

J'NAYA: Isaac, if you ever want to swing by for a night playing darts... Jack and I have started a little league. But we're still short one.

BRAHMS: Darts? Operations played darts.

J'NAYA: See? Boring's good for you. Trust me. Centuries of experience, y'know.

(The elevator dings.)

BRAHMS: You're not even forty.

J'NAYA: Take all the bad dates I've been on and I'm sure it adds up to several eternities.

BRAHMS: Good-bye, Kestra.

(He presses a button and the elevator door closes.)

(Lorhrok was approaches.)

LORHROK: Kestra. Commander. Are you okay?

J'NAYA: Not sure I'm the one you should be asking. (pause) C'mon. There's thirty thousand people here. At least Isaac's got the kids.

NEEVA: The kids?

J'NAYA: (chuckles) It's a long story. I'll tell you on the way.

(She walks away.)

SCENE 5D-05**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

DOVAN: Got any... twos?

SYLVESTE: Hmm... Go fish.

(Dovan draws a card.)

DOVAN: This has got to be the stupidest game in all space-time.

YUBARI: Have I taught you Monopoly?

DOVAN: Do you think Lorhrok and Neeva could install a tongo wheel on the bridge when they get back?

SYLVESTE: I've already put in a work order for cupholders at helm.

YUBARI: Captain, give me your sev-- (an alert sounds at her console) We're being hailed. It's Admiral Parker.

DOVAN: On screen. No, wait! Hide-- [the cards!]

PARKER: Commander Dovan.

DOVAN: Admiral Parker! What can I do for you?

PARKER: Your status, Commander?

DOVAN: Condition green, Admiral. I, I mean, Green as in good, not Green as in the codephrase. I mean everything's fine here, sir. Admiral. Uh, how are you?

PARKER: Commander, when I was the attaché to Temporal Investigations, the gentlemen there taught me a remarkable game. The rules were endless, the strategy moreso. Waiting weeks, months for alerts from the Journeyman Archive, Dilemma became an obsession for them. Even I occasionally succumbed to the temptation to try for a royal suit flop. It kept our minds limber for the challenges ahead. (long pause) But Go Fish? Really, Commander. Parker out.

DOVAN: Jehosephat! Did he... did he call just to yell at me?

YUBARI: Yes. Now, as I was saying, sir: give me your sevens.

POST-CREDITS**LOCATION: BRAHMS' TRANSPORT**

(Brahms beams in.)

BRAHMS: Ahh... Beta Five, we're back. (he starts walking toward a control console) I could use a coffee. Decaf.

(Beta Five starts beeping.)

BETA FIVE: Connection was lost during mission. Confirm your status, Supervisor One.

BRAHMS: Oh, you know; just another day at the office.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Ugh! He's beet waiting all day to say that, Beta! I tried to erase it from his mind, but sorry...

BETA FIVE: Apology accepted.

BRAHMS: You are both snobs, you know that? Now, Beta, do you have a briefing on our next assignment?

BETA FIVE: Direct Scion interface anticipated in thirty-six hours.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: (sigh) It's like they've never heard of vacations.

BRAHMS: Well, Triassa maybe... Virren and Lossiel? They probably haven't. Still. Thirty-six hours is thirty-six hours. Why don't we go somewhere fun for a change?