

Starship: Excelsior
"Guards! GET THEM!"
(Season 4, Episode 2)
by Emily Potter

Transcribed by Peter Stine

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

SCENE 402-01**LOCATION: USS EXCELSIOR – TRANSPORTER ROOM**

(Somebody beams onto the pad.)

LORHROK: Lieutenant Commander Kestra J'naya, I presume.

J'NAYA: Permission to come aboard... sir.

LORHROK: Granted; welcome aboard, Commander.

(As she steps off the platform, he steps forward... but she trips, and drops her datapads, which clatter to the floor.)

J'NAYA: Whoooah! Oh, no, I'm sorry, sir. I'll get them.

LORHROK: It's just a few PADDs, Commander. Nothing to worry about. On this ship, the crew gives you a few chances before they call you a butterfingers.

J'NAYA: Eh, how many chances?

LORHROK: I'm sure you'll never find out, Commander. I mean, you never would have made it this far in engineering if you couldn't hold a coil modulator straight, right?

J'NAYA: Ehm... (uncomfortable pause) And you must be Commander Neeva!

(Neeva steps forward.)

NEEVA: Lieutenant Commander Neeva, Chief of Operations. A pleasure, Commander.

J'NAYA: I'm so happy to finally meet you. Captain Bandeira said I should look you up when I got here.

NEEVA: And she told me to keep an eye out for you. Don't worry: with my help, in two weeks you'll know the *Excelsior* as well as you knew the *Totallic*.

J'NAYA: Thank you. I'm looking forward to it. Then you must be Lieutenant Lorhrok, the *Excelsior's* First Officer. Sorry again about the, uh... Thank you for taking the time to welcome me aboard!

LORHROK: Don't get me wrong, Miss J'naya, welcome aboard — but I'm here to warn you. Chief Engineer is a tough job. You can still get out of this.

J'NAYA: Respectfully, sir, the only thing that could keep me out of your engineering bay is a cascading coolant leak. I spent six years as assistant chief on the *Totallic*, and I'm ready for the big pool table and anything else this ship can throw at me.

LORHROK: Well, we'll see what you think after you've met Ensign Adow.

NEEVA: Now, Commander, what do you know about transporters?

J'NAYA: I built one once in the field. Why?

NEEVA: We have a chance to put that knowledge to good use. You know anything about the planet we're orbiting?

J'NAYA: No, we're in uncharted space. From the shuttle, it looked primitive — no city lights on nightside.

LORHROK: And you're right. Mantua is primitive. High medieval is our best approximation — a C-plus on the Scale of Culture. Castles, princesses... even a plague, which is threatening to send them into a Dark Age.

NEEVA: Only we're picking up a massive power source on the surface. Way beyond anything the Mantuans are capable of. And we can't beam down to investigate, because...

J'NAYA: Because something in the energy field is blocking the transporters?

NEEVA: It's stumped engineering for three hours, and Captain Dovan wants an away team on the surface in two.

J'NAYA: We'll get right on it. I'll need the transceiver assembly, of course. What's the process here for reserving time on it?

NEEVA: Actually...

LORHROK: Actually, the transceiver assembly's still offline. So are a number of other support systems. Starbase Nine-One-One patched the gaping wounds, but we still need a few days of work before we're shipshape.

NEEVA: More like weeks, actually. Here's a full damage report.

(Neeva hands over a PADD; J'naya scrolls through it.)

J'NAYA: Ehm... oi. This is... (pause) Does this mean that you're going to let me in on the Big Secret?

LORHROK: That being...?

J'NAYA: It's the only thing anyone on Starbase has talked about for a month. What happened to this ship? Where were you?

LORHROK: Sorry, Commander.

NEEVA: That's classified. If we told you...

LORHROK: ...it could destroy the galaxy.

NEEVA: Literally, I'm afraid. So I find it's best not to think about where we've been.

LORHROK: Where we're going is a lot more interesting anyway.

(Awkward pause.)

J'NAYA: Ehm... I guess I'd better get to work, then.

LORHROK: Capital idea, Miss J'naya. You'll find Chief Lorth just outside with your things. He'll give you the grand tour. Welcome aboard once again.

NEEVA: I'll put orientation and lunch on your calendar, Commander — right after we're done here at Mantua.

J'NAYA: I can't wait. Thank you.

(J'naya begins to walk out of the transporter room, but, as the door slides open, she bangs her toe into it.)

J'NAYA: Ow! Darn it!

LORHROK: Are you alright?

J'NAYA: Just... stubbed my toe. I'll be fine. Just fine!

(The door closes behind her.)

LORHROK: Well... she's going to be... interesting.

NEEVA: Adow's going to eat her alive.

LORHROK: And that's going to be... interesting.

NEEVA: I'm heading to sickbay to pick up some requisition docs. You wanna come?

LORHROK: I'm due on the bridge.

(Lorhrok starts walking. Neeva follows quickly after a moment.)

NEEVA: You're avoiding me. Ever since what happened in the shuttle.

(They exit the transporter room.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

LORHROK: You keep bringing it up.

NEEVA: If you can look me in the eye and tell me what happened between us didn't matter, I'll stop.

LORHROK: No – you know what I mean. I'm talking about Simon.

NEEVA: That right there was the sound of you bringing up Simon, not me.

LORHROK: You just asked to walk me to Sickbay. Was that, or was that not, an attempt to lead me to counselling with Doctor Sharp?

NEEVA: I... I just think you need to talk to somebody.

LORHROK: I have been.

NEEVA: Lio the Barkeep is not a counsellor, Alecz.

(They stop walking.)

LORHROK: If you want me to stop avoiding you, Neeva, stop badgering me. Simon Westlake is dead and I am figuring it out.

NEEVA: Have you talked to his father yet?

(Pause.)

(The comm beeps.)

DOVAN: *Bridge to Lorhrok.*

(Lorhrok hits his combadge.)

LORHROK: I'm on my way, sir.

DOVAN: *Belay that. We've tracked the Mantuan power source to within a few kilometers. It's even bigger than we thought, and Admiral Parker's going to want to know why.*

LORHROK: There's only one thing that could leave a footprint that big: alien interference. Some powerful race is down there trying to change Mantuan society – and doesn't want us to see it.

DOVAN: *We need more than a theory. Did that new engineer find a way to use the transporters yet?*

LORHROK: She just came aboard a minute ago, Captain.

DOVAN: *So... no?*

LORHROK: I'm afraid not.

DOVAN: *Then are you up for a little treasure hunt?*

LORHROK: Count me in.

DOVAN: *If you need more time, Number One[, I'd be happy to send Yubari in your place.]*

LORHROK: Captain, what happened last month is completely behind me.

DOVAN: *That's all I needed to hear. (Dovan presses a button) Lieutenant Lorhrok, Commander Neeva, Doctor Sharp, Mister Rol to Main Shuttlebay. Main Shuttlebay, prepare for launch.*

NEEVA: Completely behind you?

LORHROK: Completely.

MAIN CREDITS

Space, the final frontier. Somewhere, a star is exploding. Somewhere, a new colony is harvesting its first crop. Somewhere there's a city made of flame, beneath a sky that screams with song. The *Starship Excelsior*'s mission is to seek them out, and bear witness. That's all you need to know.

SCENE 402-02**LOCATION: SHUTTLE**

(Neeva is flying the ship while Sharp and Lorhrok finish dressing.)

SHARP: Does this have to be... so... tight?

ROL: You're playing the part of an enslaved surgeon. (pause) Yes, it has to be this tight. Trust the infiltration specialist.

SHARP: I can hardly breathe.

LORHROK: Maybe their plague... (he cinches up one side of his garment) Oof. Is related to the lack of air.

ROL: The upper class on the southern continent has green skin. It's close to Orion, so "Neeva, Lord of the Southmarch" will be seen as your leader. Actually... as your owner.

NEEVA: Bev, you know how I feel about slavery.

ROL: Sorry, ma'am.

LORHROK: The Prime Directive is in full force on this planet. We must not interfere with the natural development of this society.

NEEVA: Yes, sir. No references to space, other planets, or advanced civilizations. If the only cover story we have makes me a slaveholder... so be it.

SHARP: What about the plague? The Mantuans are suffering in huge numbers, and Captain Dovan put me on this team for a reason.

LORHROK: That reason is to protect us, Doctor. Find out what's making them sick, take necessary precautions, but we can't interfere. Our mission is to identify the power source – plus the alien influence behind it – and take all prudent measures. Nothing more.

SHARP: I'm not used to standing around watching people die.

LORHROK: The Prime Directive is there to protect people like this, Melissa. Even from well-intentioned people like us.

SHARP: Then on your heads be it.

NEEVA: Coming up on the landing site! Nearest town's about five clicks north of here.

LORHROK: That's where we'll start, then. We can narrow the search from there. Rol, can you help me find the hat that goes with this costume?

LOCATION: FOREST

(The shuttle descends.)

SCENE 402-03**LOCATION: MAIN ENGINEERING**

ADOW

So then she jumps up, spills the soup, and runs all the way down to sickbay, her hair still dripping wet. Turns out she broke her wrist!

JOSHI: (simultaneous) No way!

MEYERS: (simultaneous) Aw, man. I didn't even know you could get water out of a sonic shower.

NIK D: (simultaneous) That's incredible.

ADOW: It takes a special kind of engineer to screw up a shower that bad. But, hey, I heard it straight from the yeoman on the *Totallic*. Our new Chief Engineer? Kind of a mess.

MEYERS: I looked up her dossier. She looks alright. Lots of experience, a few decorations, beautiful smile...

ADOW: Meyers, stop right there. I have two words for you: Ice. Queen.

MEYERS: No! I mean, maybe — I don't — not gonna — sure, she's a fine-looking woman, but that's [not —]

JOSHI: Attention on deck!

(All four engineers snap to attention.)

J'NAYA: Thanks, everyone, but that's not going to be necessary. You can relax. I'm Lieutenant Commander Kestra J'naya, I'm the *Excelsior's* new chief engineer, and I'm very happy to be here. I'd love to spend some time getting to know you all, but the captain's already given us a priority assignment, so let's just get your names and then you can help me figure out how we do things around here. Ensign, can you start?

JOSHI: Yes, ma'am. I'm Ensign Sheherazad Joshi, propulsion specialist.

ADOW: Ensign Kinash Adow. I've been running this place, which I guess makes me your new... assistant. Ma'am.

NIK D: Petty Officer Nikolas Demetropoulos, Systems Tech.

MEYERS: And I'm Master Chief Meyers. Jack Meyers, Engineer's Mate.

NIK D: We'll see about that, Jack.

MEYERS: Nik, I love you; shut up.

J'NAYA: Alright, you all know the job: we need to punch transporters through that energy field. I hear your transceiver assembly's still down, so I think our first job is to get it running again. Jack, that sounds like it's in your wheelhouse?

MEYERS: Perfect, boss-lady.

J'NAYA: Right, the transceiver should give us some solid data, then we can plan our next move.

ADOW: Wrong.

J'NAYA: Kinash? You have something to add?

ADOW: We don't need the whole transceiver array. We can get all the data we need with subspace echolocation. I can have the main deflector ready for that in half the time.

J'NAYA: That's... a bit unorthodox, Ensign. I like it. Hmm... (pause) But, if the energy field is disrupting subspace, that could overwhelm our signal. Then we'd have wasted an hour and still need to fix the transceiver. No, I like it, but I'm gonna have to say, we play it safe this time. So, everyone, Meyers is on point. Give him whatever he needs, and I'll meet you down there as soon as I've run a standard systems check. Dismissed.

(They all part ways.)

SCENE 402-04**LOCATION: ROYAL COURTYARD - BALCONY**

(There is music and dancing down in the courtyard. Up on the balcony, the King broods. His daughter approaches from behind him.)

PRINCESS: Father, why are you in here brooding again?

KING: Because they are my subjects, Allina, and I am their king. I must help them, before it's too late.

PRINCESS: Watching them dance won't help anyone, father. It'll only foul your mood.

KING: I just... If I watch long enough, one of them might betray a hint, a meaning. Something other than that vacant joy on their faces. It's so much like death, Allie. You don't remember when your mother...

PRINCESS: You've done more than most lords, your majesty. You've given them shelter from the elements instead of putting them out on the street. You've hired musicians to help them pass through the plague. And you've even asked Helmut to help cool their blood.

KING: A decision I regret daily, daughter. There is some reason you sought me out, I take it?

PRINCESS: Yes, father. Three visitors have requested an audience.

KING: Is that so? Tell them to come back on the Ides, during my regular audience. Do not trouble me with trifles, child.

PRINCESS: Father, one of them is green.

KING: Green? Green skin, all over? Is he from the Southern continents?

PRINCESS: That, or she has a very serious skin condition.

KING: I haven't seen a Southron since I was a squire.

PRINCESS: I know.

KING: Why didn't you say so at once, Allina?

PRINCESS: Because, father, you look so funny when you're surprised.

SCENE 402-05**LOCATION: CASTLE HALLWAY**

(The Away Team is walking down the hallway, escorted by two pike-carrying guards, one in front and one behind them.)

LORHROK: Okay, keep your eyes peeled for anything out of place. If there's an alien influence at work here, it's probably subtle. They obviously haven't made their presence known yet. Subversion before subjugation.

(A guard opens the wooden doors to the royal court as the Away Team approaches and passes through.)

LOCATION: ROYAL COURT

(A trio of trumpets plays a brief entrance fanfare as the guard announces them.)

GUARD #1: Your majesty, the Lady Neeva, emerald among emeralds, noblewoman of the Southmarch, absolute sovereign of the Excelsior Estate, accompanied by her personal... servants.

KING: Princess Allina, where's Helmut? He knows he's due at audiences.

PRINCESS: I'll have a summons sent.

LORHROK: Remember: anything out of the ordinary. Anything out of place. Blink and we might miss it.

KING: My Lady Neeva! Honored guests! I [greet you as the emissary of friends too long parted!]

(Suddenly, Helmut appears out of thin air)

HELMUT: Your majesty! It is I, Helmut, of the Great and Most Blessed Order of Wizards! I am so sorry I am late.

LORHROK: Did he just...?

SHARP: Appear out of thin air right in front of us?

NEEVA: Does that count as out of the ordinary?

HELMUT: It's a bit dim in here, isn't it? I hate cloudy days. With a flick of my wand, let there be light!

(There is an odd sound. Like a whooshing noise.)

SHARP: Those stone panels... they're glowing!

NEEVA: How did he do that?

LORHROK: They're not stone. I'd know that glow anywhere: it's photoluminescent aluminium! Atomic Age technology at the absolute least.

KING: Um. Yes... thank you, Helmut.

HELMUT: Of course, your majesty. Anything for our people!

KING: We have guests, noble Wizard. Visitors, attend and pay homage!

NEEVA: Your majesty.

KING: My lady Neeva. Too long has it been since last we tested our hospitality on our viridescent sisters in the South. Your people are even more beautiful than I remembered.

NEEVA: Thank you, your majesty.

KING: My daughter, Princess Allina [uh-LEE-nuh].

ALLINA: Hello!

NEEVA: My surgeon, Melissa, and my... valet, Alecz.

KING: Beautiful names all.

(Helmut the wizard steps forward.)

HELMUT: If I may, my lord?

KING: Ah. Yes. And this is an emissary of the wizarding clan. Helmut.

NEEVA: You marvel us with your power, wizard. How came you by such magic?

HELMUT: Ah, my lady, you must understand, a wizard never reveals his tricks.

LORHROK: So it is a trick, then?

HELMUT: Pardon?

NEEVA: Alecz, behave yourself. We could use a man of Helmut's... talents back on the Estate.

KING: Alas! that your gimlet eye has fallen at once away from me, my lady.

NEEVA: Change your tone at once, my lord; jealousy does not befit such a gracious visage.

KING: Do not think I regret it too much, for how nobler a love if it should never be returned.

NEEVA: Do not be so quick to soothsay, my lord; wiser than us have found that love moves stranger than the stars foretell. Is Helmut for sale?

KING: I'm sorry?

ALLINA: Father?

NEEVA: Did I lapse into my native tongue? I wish to know how much money you want for Helmut's ownership deed.

HELMUT: Ha ha ha! A wonderful specimen, my lord! But perhaps you should correct her on the... finer points of Northern property law?

GUARD #1: (giggles)

KING: Wait. What was that?

GUARD #1: (laughs out loud)

KING: Oh, no. Guard! GUARD! Princess, grab his pike!

SFX: Allina is already running; she reaches the guard and swats his wood (with metal tip) pike out of his hands. It falls to the ground.

PRINCESS: I have him! It's starting!

(The guard begins to dance.)

SHARP: Is he...?

LORHROK: Dancing.

PRINCESS: Come on, Fulton. Snap out of it. Stop dancing.

GUARD #1: I... I can't, my lady! Help me. (helplessly, he GIGGLES again!)

PRINCESS: For God's sake, Helmut, DO SOMETHING!

HELMUT: I'm sorry, my lady. This curse is still beyond our magic.

KING: You have to help yourself here, Fulton. You're a free man of virtue. Whatever spirits have taken you...

(The guard speeds up his dance.)

(Guard #1 laughs again, quite uncontrollably, for a long time in the background.)

PRINCESS: It's too late, my lord. He's gone.

(Pause.)

KING: Very well. Have him put with the others, before it spreads. And stay away from him, Allina. All he can do now is get you sick, too.

SHARP: I'm... sorry. What did we just see?

KING: Do you mean to say the plague has not reached the Southmarch?

SHARP: No, it has. The plague is everywhere. It's just...

LORHROK: It doesn't look quite the same where we come from. Less, um...

SHARP: Less dancing. Can I see your other patients? Is there a hospital? I'm a doctor, and we have some... ways of looking at the Plague that maybe your doctors haven't tried yet.

PRINCESS: Anything that could help would earn a hundred years' gratitude from this kingdom.

KING: Lead the way, Princess Allina.

PRINCESS: Your majesty.

(Helmut, Sharp, the King, and the Princess begin to walk away. Lorhrok and Neeva hang back a minute.)

LORHROK: You alright, Commander?

NEEVA: Just a little... Hm. (pause) I'm fine.

LORHROK: That was impressive wordplay back there. Where did you learn to talk like that?

NEEVA: Some of the most well-spoken men I ever knew were in the Syndicate. They were also the most dangerous. If you wanted to live, you learned to speak their language. (pause) If you ever hear me buttering you up like that, it means I've got one hand on my dagger. When I care about a man, I tell him what he needs to hear, whether he likes it or not.

LORHROK: I'll keep that in mind.

PRINCESS: (in background) *Here is the Courtyard of the Plague.*

(In the background, a big door opens up.)

SHARP: (in background) *Christ almighty!*

LORHROK: We'd better catch up. I may need a distraction in a minute, Neeva.

(They both hurry across the room.)

LOCATION: COURTYARD

(Dancers & music at a short distance.)

SHARP: So all these dancers are really... your patients?

KING: Yes, surgeon. It steals upon them, day or night. The only warning is a laugh, peasant or noble, good or evil. Then, the laughing ends, and they dance.

LORHROK: All day?

PRINCESS: And all night. They drink only if we pour water down their throats. They don't eat at all.

HELMUT: It's a frenzy. They just keep dancing, until...

NEEVA: Until... what?

KING: Until they die, Lady Neeva. That is why we call it a plague. Since it appeared six months ago, we've lost a hundred souls to it. It only grows.

(Pause.)

SHARP: May I take a closer look? I have certain... medical tools.

PRINCESS: We've already studied the eyes and wrists, Melissa. If there's a pattern, we don't know it. Perhaps you'll fare better. May I join you? Foreign medicine fascinates me.

LORHROK: Lady Neeva?

NEEVA: I think perhaps my valet had better assist her. In the meantime, perhaps you can explain... those tapestries to me?

KING: Oh, well, yes! There you'll see the crest of my father, given him [after he held off Duke Camlaan's army with twenty-seven knights in the forest of Argonne. On the left...]

LORHROK: Come on.

(Sharp and Lorchrok walk away.)

SHARP: Are we safely out of sight?

LORHROK: Go ahead.

The King's explanation becomes inaudible at this point.

(Sharp pulls out her tricorder.)

LORHROK: What was all that about the 'eyes and wrists'?

SHARP: Folk medicine. Don't worry about it. Lots of strange ideas about disease in C-plus civilizations.

LORHROK: Like this plague? I mean... dancing? Are these people really sick?

SHARP: Actually, it's not unheard of. "Dancing plagues" have been historically reported on Andor, Kellogg Nine, and Earth. For example, in 1374, dancing broke out in the middle of Germany, then quickly spread across most of the cities in Western Europe. At the time, they thought it could be a curse sent by the saints.

LORHROK: (snorts) Superstition, I take it.

SHARP: Frankly, none of the explanations modern medicine offers are much better. The dancing plague has always been something of a mystery.

LORHROK: Well, it sounds like a mass hysteria.

SHARP: Mass hysteria is what doctors blame when they want to make the unexplainable go away. It's a surrender flag, not an answer.

LORHROK: I'm not sure how much longer Neeva can keep the King distracted.

(The tricorder starts making alert noises.)

SHARP: That's alright. I've got something.

LORHROK: What?

SHARP: This disease isn't not a virus or a bacterium. Whatever this is is going straight to the brain. There's a state of neurological excitation in the hypothalamus and the premotor cortex.

LORHROK: What's causing it?

SHARP: I don't know. Some kind of energy field I can't pin down. Certainly nothing I'd recognize as a "natural" disease.

LORHROK: Wait, are you saying... the wizards?

SHARP: Unless you think King Tapestry over there is capable of building an advanced bioweapon, I don't have any other suspects.

LORHROK: It's one thing to exploit a primitive people. It's quite another to murder them. By disease.

SHARP: But, like the plague itself, it's hardly unheard of.

LORHROK: If you're right, Melissa, then the Prime Directive doesn't apply to the plague. Leave the Wizards to me, but find a cure. Fast.

SHARP: I need to study how this develops before I can tell you more. If I narrow the tolerance field here... (she changes some things on her tricorder) ...I should be able to find someone whose brain is already being affected, but isn't symptomatic yet. Then it should just be a matter of seeing how the disease develops.

(Princess Allina steps over.)

PRINCESS: How is it going, you two?

(Sharp hastily closes and stows her tricorder.)

SHARP: Um...

LORHROK: You were right about the eyes and veins, your highness. This plague affects your people differently than ours, but we still don't know how to cure it.

PRINCESS: I can't tell you how sorry I am to hear that. (pause) But come. We must show you the treatment due to distant emissaries. And, between you and I, if my father spends another minute trying to impress the Lady Neeva, she may drop dead of boredom.

SHARP: Thank you for your hospitality, your highness. We'll be right there. Tell them our valet is tired and needs rest.

PRINCESS: Of course, Melissa. You can call me Allina.

(The Princess walks away again.)

LORHROK: So now all we have to do is find your test subject.

SHARP: No. I already found a test subject.

LORHROK: What? Who?

SHARP: It showed up on the brain scan, plain as day. (pause) Princess Allina is in the earliest stages of neurological excitation. If we don't stop this plague, in a few hours she'll be out here on the dance floor with the rest of them.

SCENE 402-06**LOCATION: MAIN ENGINEERING**

(J'naya climbs up a ladder to the upper level.)

J'NAYA: Ensign Adow. I didn't expect to find you up here. The transceiver assembly's online, then?

ADOW: Don't know, don't care, and, as of this moment, neither do you. Take a look at this.

(Adow presses a button and data starts streaming.)

ADOW: Everything you'd want to know about the energy field and more, all through subspace echolocation.

(J'naya presses some buttons.)

J'NAYA: You've even found the variance frequency. But the subspace distortion...

ADOW: I compensated.

J'NAYA: This is... excellent work, Ensign. The energy field won't stand a chance with this new data. I see that I underestimated your technical skills.

ADOW: You sure did.

(J'naya hits her combadge.)

J'NAYA: J'naya to Meyers.

MEYERS: *Meyers here.*

J'NAYA: Cease repairs on the transceiver assembly. We've got a new source of information up here. Report back to main engineering for the next step.

MEYERS: *Right quick, boss-lady. Meyers out.*

J'NAYA: As for you, Ensign...

ADOW: Yes?

J'NAYA: You're relieved of duty and restricted from engineering systems, effective immediately.

ADOW: What?

J'NAYA: You disobeyed my direct orders, jeopardizing our mission and the Away Team. You may be a technical genius, but if you can't follow my lead, I can't work with you. Report to your quarters and think about it. We don't need you for the rest of this assignment.

ADOW: I just helped you get to the Away Team! How dare you?

J'NAYA: Ensign, see these pips? I'm not some junior-grade lieutenant wandering in here to prove myself. I've been running engineering teams since you were in junior high. And the one thing I've seen that's true at every posting, everywhere in the galaxy, is that a team that can't work like one is — sooner or later — going to get a lot of people killed. You're relieved. (pause) Ensign?

(Pause.)

ADOW: This isn't over.

J'NAYA: I certainly hope not. After this mission, I'll make us some tea. We'll talk then.

ADOW: Sure. Tea.

(Adow stalks off toward an exit.)

SCENE 402-07**LOCATION: PRINCESS'S BEDCHAMBER**

NEEVA: Get the door, Alecz.

LORHROK: Oh. Yeah.

(He closes the door behind him.)

NEEVA: Okay, Melissa. We broke into the Princess's bedroom. The rest is up to you.

(Sharp walks over to the bed.)

SHARP: Administering sedative. (She uses a hypospray) Beginning a full neurological scan. (She scans with her tricorder) (pause) This is the damndest thing.

LORHROK: What?

SHARP: We're really not dealing with a disease in any traditional sense of the word. Some kind of signal being transmitted directly into the Princess's hypothalamus – like Neeva's pheromones but ten times more powerful – inducing a... frenzied state.

LORHROK: The laughing and dancing?

SHARP: Exactly. Her brain chemistry is rapidly deteriorating; she has hours, at most. Maybe minutes.

NEEVA: Can you trace the signal back to its source?

SHARP: Trying.

(Outside the door, footsteps approach.)

HELMUT: *Are you certain, your majesty?*

NEEVA: Lieutenant. Did you hear that?

KING: *We must attend all the closer to our prayers in this time of plague.*

LORHROK: Hear what? (pause) Spast.

GUARD #3: *Then you don't trust the wizards, your majesty?*

HELMUT: *You read a bit much into the king's words, young man.*

SHARP: What's the problem?

NEEVA: (hissing) The king is outside!

SHARP: Damn. I just need another minute.

KING: *The Wizards are a tool of Providence, Smithson – the same Providence that ordained the liturgy of Vigils, Matins, and Lauds.*

LORHROK: No, he's coming in here. Abort. The side door is our best...

(The door opens, and the king walks in.)

LORHROK: ...exit.

(Tense pause.)

KING: Lady Neeva. I trust you, too, are here to join my daughter's nightly prayer for health.

NEEVA: Um... your majesty, this isn't what it looks like.

HELMUT: It is customary in the northlands to enter only where you have been invited.

KING: Silence, Helmut. This is my daughter. Guards, step back.

GUARD #2, GUARD #3, AND GUARD #4: (simultaneously) Your majesty.

(They all take a step back.)

KING: Now, perhaps one of you will tell me what witchcraft your 'surgeon' was working on my daughter. Or did you think I did not see her wand?

LORHROK: I'm not sure what you mean.

KING: Do you think me blind? I saw a device, [wizardry, I don't know.]

SHARP: It's called a tricorder.

LORHROK: Ensign Sharp!

SHARP: He saw it. That damage is done. Now, your majesty, your daughter is going to become sick with the plague very soon now, but I'm [trying to stop it.]

(The Princess giggles.)

NEEVA: Oh, no.

KING: What?

SHARP: As I was saying, your majesty...

(The Princess giggles again.)

HELMUT: What have you done to the Princess?

(The princess rises from her bed and begins to dance, just like the guard in the last scene. All the while, still laughing.)

LORHROK: Your majesty, I know what this looks like, but we're here to help the princess. The Wizards, they're the ones responsible for the plague, and we have to help them.

KING: Allina. Allina, can you hear me? Please stop dancing. Go back to sleep, sweetheart.
(pause) Guards, arrest these sorcerors.

NEEVA: Alecz?

LORHROK: RUN!

(Neeva, Lorchrok, and Sharp run through the side door.)

LOCATION: CASTLE CORRIDOR

KING: ***GUARDS! GET THEEEEEEM!***

(The guards set off in hot pursuit.)

HELMUT: ***Colloportus! Cave Inimicum!***

(He casts some magic at the Away Team)

LORHROK: Melissa!

GUARD #3: Damn! That spell almost got her!

SHARP: I'm alright! Go go go!

LORHROK: Neeva, we need an exit!

NEEVA: Ahmmm...

SFX: A gong goes off in the background.

LORHROK: Neeva, you've got this!

(Bells all around the castle chime.)

NEEVA: You're right! But you're not going to like it!

LORHROK: I like anything better than getting caught by these fine gentlemen, Lady Neeva!

NEEVA: Okay, up those stairs!

SHARP: I'm not sure I can keep up!

LORHROK: Come on, Doctor! Where are we going, Neeva?

NEEVA: Out of the castle!

LORHROK: Then why are we going up to the fourth floor?

NEEVA: I said you weren't gonna like it!

(She shoves a door open and they run out onto the ramparts.)

LOCATION: CASTLE RAMPARTS

GUARD #2: They're on the ramparts!

GUARD #3: Stop them!

LORHROK: Where do we go from here? There are guards everywhere!

NEEVA: Jump!

LORHROK: WHAT?!

NEEVA: JUMP! The castle's surrounded by a moat! We'll be fine! Watch!
WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(She falls into the moat with a splash.)

(Sharp is tackled by one of the guards.)

GUARD #2: Hnngh! I've got her! I've got the white woman!

SHARP: Alecz!

LORHROK: Melissa!

SHARP: Take my tricorder!

SFX: She tosses her tricorder as she says that, and it skitters across the stones.

LORHROK: I'm not leaving without you!

GUARD #3: Suits us fine, Southlander!

GUARD #4: Yeah, c'mere, laddybuck. Hnnng!

(He lunges at Lorhrok. Punches are thrown! Guard #3 goes down with a groan.)

SHARP: Alecz, look out! The edge!

LORHROK: Whoa --- oaaaah! Ahhhhhhhhhh!

(We follow him down, and we hear a great SPLASH followed almost instantly by a heavy, muffled, underwater *thunk*.)

SCENE 402-08**LOCATION: CHURCH COURTYARD**

(It has started gently raining.)

LORHROK: Uhhnn... uhn. Wha...?

NEEVA: It's alright. You're alright.

LORHROK: Oh, hey there... beautiful lady. (pause) Does that painting seem weird to you?

NEEVA: Oh, for...

(Neeva opens her medpak, rifles through it, finds a hypospray, and injects it into Lorhrok's neck.)

NEEVA: There. That'll help you think straight. You hit your head when you fell, mild concussion, but it could have been a lot worse.

LORHROK: Uhhhn. How long?

NEEVA: About half an hour. And I had to carry you for most of that. We need to get moving: I claimed sanctuary in this chapel, but I'm not sure that'll hold when the King's troops show up at the gate.

(Lorhrok gets to his feet.)

LORHROK: Where's Melissa?

NEEVA: You don't remember?

LORHROK: She was... captured.

NEEVA: Yeah. You and I barely got out of there. Guards were all over the place.

LORHROK: You left her behind?!

NEEVA: I had to get you away!

LORHROK: They could kill her! Spast, she might already be dead!

NEEVA: Melissa Sharp is a smart, capable woman. She'll be okay.

LORHROK: You can't know that!

NEEVA: And even if she weren't, there was nothing I could do. (pause) You wanna go back and storm the castle? The two of us against a thousand troops?

(Pause.)

LORHROK: No, you're right. There wasn't anything you could have done. I slipped off the wall. It's my fault.

NEEVA: I didn't say that.

LORHROK: The best way we can help the doctor now is to stop the plague and expose these "wizards" for what they are. Did you have a chance to review her tricorder scans?

NEEVA: Yes. The plague is being generated by a massive energy field that envelops most of the planet. Melissa was using the Princess's illness to trace the source.

LORHROK: The same power source we came here to find?

NEEVA: Definitely. Unfortunately, we don't have a clear trace. A rough distance and a vague heading – not enough to go on.

LORHROK: What about the *Excelsior*?

NEEVA: I can't raise them through the interference. And we can't double back to the shuttle, because the search parties are in that direction.

LORHROK: Then we need to gather intelligence. How about that priest you mentioned? And, really, what is with this painting?

NEEVA: It's just some angel or something.

LORHROK: No, I mean, look at the edges. The brickwork is so well-balanced, and then those sharp edges... they weaken the whole structure [of the wall.]

(A big door off to the side swings open, and four guards march out of it.)

GUARD #3: Cuthbert, search the belfry! Newcastle, the undercroft. Tannen and I will cover this courtyard. Baskerville's boys'll have the rest!

GUARD #4: If you sees a hint of 'er, let 'er taste yer steel!

(They march off in their various directions.)

LORHROK: They haven't seen us.

NEEVA: A few pillars and shadows won't hide us for long. We have to go.

LORHROK: Didn't you hear him? We're surrounded!

NEEVA: We've got to try!

(Lorhrok walks over to the wall.)

LORHROK: Seriously, look at this painting.

NEEVA: We don't have time for art criticism, sir! We have to go!

LORHROK: Right... here.

(He presses a brick into the wall. We hear gears and then grinding stones.)

NEEVA: A secret door!

LORHROK: I told you it looked weird. C'mon!

(They run in and the door closes behind them.)

NEEVA: I guess it'd be too much to ask for a secret passage with lighting.

LORHROK: It's alright; it's not very long. Here's the far wall. And if I just push... Uhhhhnf!

(A wooden wall swings open.)

LOCATION: PUBLIC HOUSE - BASEMENT

(Faint music and laughter can be heard through the wooden ceiling, a level above.)

NEEVA

Where are we? A wine cellar?

LORHROK: Seems that way. I hear music upstairs, and laughter. (pause) Let's head up and try to blend in. With a little luck, we'll get our information and a little dinner, too. Here are the stairs.

(They walk up the creaky wooden stairs.)

LOCATION: MANTUAN PUBLIC HOUSE

LORHROK: Why does the church need a secret passageway connecting it to... a common neighborhood pub?

NEEVA: You clearly haven't met many clerics, Alecz. I'll handle this.

(Neeva approaches the bartender.)

NEEVA: Excuse me, barkeep, good sir!

MANTUAN: Oh! Oh, yes, milady? What can I do for a beautiful visitor from Southern lands?

NEEVA: I have been sent as an ambassador. My people doubt the power of your Wizarding Order. I must... ah... take council with them. At their... Fortress?

MANTUAN FEMALE: Well isn't that just lovely! The Wizards, milady – they changed everything 'round here. The streets are lit at all hours, nobody goes 'ungry, and all they ask in return is their bit o' land. The King? His most trusted adviser's the head of the Wizarding Order.

NEEVA: I have seen an example of Adviser Helmut's power. But I do not know where he... holds court?

MANTUAN: Outside the city, half a day's walk southeast by south will take you to the edge of the Enchanted Forest. They say the Wizards have built a great fortress of steel and glass.

LORHROK: Those coordinates agree with Melissa's calculations.

MANTUAN FEMALE: That's all we know. Didn't Helmut the Wise tell you this?

NEEVA: It's...

LORHROK: Milady is being tested.

NEEVA: Yes! I am being tested, as I am testing them. It's a game. One people of power and influence like to play.

MANTUAN FEMALE: Oh, of course, milady. No offense intended!

NEEVA: None taken. I wish you prosperity and happiness for your help, and...

(Outside, a thunderclap, and a stiff wind picks up.)

LORHROK: ...what's happening?

NEEVA: It's getting bright. White light, coming from nowhere.

LORHROK: Clearly. I mean, what is that?

MANTUAN: The Great and Most Blessed Order of Wizards has a message for us all! Look, out the window! A message in the sky!

(There is a loud magic flash.)

MANTUAN FEMALE: Oi! It's you!

LORHROK: Why are our three-meter-tall versions of our faces floating in mid-air over the village?

NEEVA: Must be a projector field.

MANTUAN FEMALE: Wanted...? By the Wizarding Order of Mantua?

NEEVA: Oh, space.

LORHROK: So much for dinner.

MANTUAN: Attacking the princess. Reward... dead or alive!

NEEVA: Now that just seems excessive.

MANTUAN FEMALE: You are enemies of the wizards! Enemies of us all!

LORHROK: No, I promise, we're trying to stop the plague!

MANTUAN FEMALE: GUARDS! PLEASE! HELP! GUARDS!

NEEVA: Alecz, run!

(They burst out the door of the tavern at top speed, running down the street.)

(A small bell starts to ring.)

(Almost immediately, there's another magic flash.)

HELMUT: Halt! In the name of the law!

NEEVA: Helmut!

LORHROK: What have you done with Melissa?

HELMUT: Lightning bolt!

LORHROK: Neeva, look out!

(Arcs of electricity shoot out of Helmut's wand and strike the pavement.)

NEEVA: I'm alright!

HELMUT: Your 'surgeon' is in custody. She has been given twelve hours to remove her curse from the princess.

LORHROK: And what happens at the end of twelve hours?!

HELMUT: There is only one punishment for high treason: she will die by hanging. Glacius!

(A magical beam of frost lances out. It glances off Lorhrok and audibly crystallizes a nearby cart.)

LORHROK: Ow!

NEEVA: Alecz!

LORHROK: Just my shoulder! Run! We're almost there!

HELMUT: End the plague or pay the price!

LORHROK: End it yourself, Wizard!

HELMUT: So be it! Ancient powers, lords of old, Stop these killers; burn this road!

(Another "magic flash" and the road explodes into flame!)

NEEVA: Oh no!

LORHROK: We can't get around it!

NEEVA: The forest! This way!

(They run down another road.)

HELMUT: You can't escape! My brethren are homing in on my location! You'll be surrounded! Surrender or die!

LORHROK: Oh, to hell with you.

(He whips out his phaser, charges it up, and fires at Helmut, all in one action. The beam hits Helmut.)

HELMUT: Augh!

(Helmut loses consciousness and immediately falls out of the air to the cobblestones with a heavy bodyfall sound.)

LORHROK: Come on, Neeva!

NEEVA: A phaser? Prime Directive?

LORHROK: Helmut's obviously an alien; doesn't count. Besides, we can't afford to get caught. Melissa's counting on us.

(They run into the foilage.)

LOCATION: THE FOREST

(They stop for a moment to catch their breath.)

NEEVA: Okay... what now?

LORHROK: Now? We run all the way to this "Enchanted Forest" and end this before they kill Doctor Sharp.

(They set off running.)

SCENE 409-12**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

YUBARI: Here are the latest scans, Ensign. We're getting better at compensating for interference, but still no sign of the Away Team. Just guards, hundreds of them, all over the countryside.

ROL: What is ***happening*** down there? (pause) No, wait. Hang on. Scroll back to that last image. The castle courtyard.

(She does so.)

ROL: What is that?

YUBARI: Elevated wooden platform, three ropes hanging from it. (pause) Oh. It's a gallows. (pause) That's not good.

ROL: No, it's not. On Mantua, the death penalty is reserved for political crimes — like espionage, or treason. Exactly the kind of thing a foreigner like "Lady Neeva" could be charged with.

YUBARI: You think they've captured the Away Team?

ROL: At least part of it. And they're eager to dispense some justice. (pause) Why, I can't guess.

YUBARI: We need those transporters. How long do we have?

ROL: Mantuan custom holds that all executions must take place at the exact moment of sunset. Adjusting for local time... (pause) That's in barely fifteen hours. We have to tell the captain.

SCENE 402-11**LOCATION: FOREST**

LORHROK: (chewing) Mmm. Mmm! (swallows) You know, in the old days, Starfleet rations were terrible.

NEEVA: Are you old enough to have "old days"? What are you, twenty-five?

LORHROK: Twenty-six! I was at the Academy during the War.

NEEVA: Wait, really? I was joking. You're twenty-six?

LORHROK: What should I do with this wrapper?

(He balls up the ration wrapper.)

NEEVA: Pile it with mine. I'll vaporize them. We can't leave a trail. I can't believe I slept with someone so young.

LORHROK: It wasn't your fault. Your Orion pheremones...

NEEVA: It wasn't anyone's fault. We were under the influence of powerful drugs that neither of us intended. It's just... [weird. Thinking about it. Yeesh.]

LORHROK: Quiet! (pause) Get down.

(They both drop into the foilage.)

(Three armored people walking by. Lorhrok and Neeva are breathing heavily as they pass.)

GUARD 1: [We don't have to sentence them, just] find them and bring them back. The king wants to have words.

GUARD 2: Never seen a Southron before.

(Lorhrok pulls out his phaser and charges it.)

NEEVA: Alecz, no!

GUARD 3: Probably never will, now. 'Cept maybe on a pike.

GUARD 1: Don't envy the poor guy got dragged along with her.

NEEVA: They're passing.

LORHROK: Okay.

GUARD 2: Think she's really a doctor?

GUARD 3: Does it matter? The Wizards can't [cure anyone, don't think some servant midwife can change the game.]

(The guards walk out of range.)

(Neeva and Lorhrok stand up again.)

NEEVA: Alecz?

LORHROK: I'm fine.

NEEVA: You can put your phaser away.

LORHROK: What? (pause) Oh.

(He de-charges his phaser and reholsters it.)

NEEVA: Breathe. Just breathe.

LORHROK: Fine. I'm fine, Neeva.

NEEVA: We won't have to kill anyone here. We're just... fact-finding.

LORHROK: Less than three months ago I went on a "fact-finding" mission to Gevinon Prime. I personally murdered two helpless aliens, barely escaped the planet as it burned, and a teenage boy I swore to protect is never coming home.

NEEVA: We aren't leaving anyone behind today. We know exactly where Doctor Sharp is and the *Excelsior* is going to get her out – if we don't cure the plague first. (pause) We're not going to have another Simon on Mantua.

LORHROK: You're right. (exhale) You're right, Neeva. Come on.

(They resume walking.)

NEEVA: I am too, you know.

LORHROK: What?

NEEVA: I'm afraid of what happened on Gevinon. The choices we made. Who I became.

LORHROK: Talking to a counselor... is it helping?

NEEVA: Usually. I can sleep. Well, more than I was, anyway.

LORHROK: I don't even remember the last time I fell asleep. Sometimes I can't even breathe.

NEEVA: Your chest gets tight, like you're drowning. And you're afraid: what happens if I pass out?

LORHROK: How do you know?

NEEVA: You're not the first person in Starfleet history to have a panic attack. As the humans say, we're only human.

LORHROK: Ha. Don't let Dovan hear you say that. (pause) I feel fine. I can think straight. I wasn't showing off when I told the captain I could handle this mission. I can... until I can't.

NEEVA: And I wasn't showing off when I asked you to come to counseling with me.

LORHROK: (with an exhale) I owe you an apology. A long one.

NEEVA: It's a long walk to the forest.

LORHROK: You deserve a lot more credit than I've given you.

NEEVA: Usually true.

LORHROK: I mean as an officer. You've earned those pips.

NEEVA: I know.

LORHROK: You're not big on modesty, are you, Commander?

NEEVA: You seem to think I should be flattered that you're finally acknowledging my rank and experience.

LORHROK: I'm sorry. I just meant... well, I read your record. While I was avoiding you, on the *Excelsior*.

NEEVA: And?

LORHROK: You didn't just put in your time and wait for those pips. You fought for them. You did what the job demanded even when it cost you friends or more. (pause) And I couldn't stop thinking about when we fought, and I tried to take those pips away from you.

NEEVA: I believe in Starfleet. I believe in myself. That's all I need. (pause) What do you believe in, Alec?

LORHROK: I used to be able to answer that question so easily. Now? Between you and me... I have no idea.

NEEVA: The crew?

LORHROK: No. That's Dovan. He'd take the fall for the greenest — er, newest — cadet on the ship, especially after Gevinon. Saving lives in general? Doctor Sharp's bailiwick. And Bevoney Rol has shown me that, whatever I do believe in, it isn't quite my-Federation-right-or-wrong.

NEEVA: Then you believe in doing the right thing.

LORHROK: That's what I would have said, before. But I don't feel qualified to judge anymore.

NEEVA: This isn't the chat I thought we were going to have.

LORHROK: What?

NEEVA: Suddenly I'm the sounding board for a soul-search, and you've barely looked at me since Gevinon.

LORHROK: Which is exactly why I'm not qualified to say what's right and wrong.

NEEVA: So you know it's wrong?

LORHROK: Yes.

NEEVA: Then you're still perfectly qualified; you just have to start acting on it again. You're scared to try. (pause) Which is understandable, if this is your approach.

LORHROK: I thought it was a good approach.

NEEVA: I take back what I said about your judgment.

LORHROK: I'm an engineer. People skills aren't my strong suit.

NEEVA: I'm an engineer, too. I'm also more emotionally mature than a teenager. Just have a conversation.

LORHROK: I am, I'm trying. You aren't making it easy.

NEEVA: You haven't earned easy.

LORHROK: I'm trying to tell you, that I respect you. As an officer, as a woman, and as someone who has done nothing but try to help me while I've lashed out.

NEEVA: I'm proud of you.

LORHROK: Oh, come on, I—

NEEVA: I mean it. That was much better.

LORHROK: I mean it, too. (pause) I did warn you that I'm not much of a boyfriend.

NEEVA: You said a lot of things in that shuttle. I'm still waiting to find out which ones were true.

SCENE 402-09**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR QUARTERS**

J'NAYA: (while working with some tools) Engineering Log, supplemental. After seventeen hours working on the transporter problem, Jack and Joshi finally convinced me to get some rest. I wish I could. The comm system in my quarters has gone bollocks-up, paging random officers to my front door – and it's barely oh-three-hundred hours. Frak.

J'NAYA: Replicator ready?

COMPUTER: Specify foodstuff.

J'NAYA: A tall glass of cold water, Computer. What's the temperature in here? Is it always this hot on *Excelsior*?

(The computer replicates.)

COMPUTER: Twenty-eight degrees centigrade.

J'NAYA: What? (pause) Computer, I'm sweating through my uniform, which isn't even supposed to be possible. It must be pushing fifty. (she takes a sip and immediately spits it out!) What is this? It sure as hell isn't water!

COMPUTER: (beeps) Temperature is twenty-eight degrees centigrade.

(J'naya starts doing engineering stuff with engineering tools again.)

J'NAYA: Well, frak me. Sensors and the replicator, too. I may never sleep again...

(The doorbell sounds.)

J'NAYA: Oh, no, not another one. Come!

(The door opens, and someone walks in.)

J'NAYA: I'm sorry, whoever you are! My comm system's gone crazy. I didn't page you, I'm trying to fix it, and I'm sorry [for getting you out of bed].

DOVAN: Is it always this hot on Risa?

J'NAYA: Actually, my mother's from Risa, but I grew up in Ireland. Some bollocksed-up widget on this bollocksed-up ship is just... Wait. You're...

DOVAN: Trying not to take offense, yes.

(She jumps to her feet.)

J'NAYA: Captain Dovan! I'm so sorry, sir, I didn't... I mean, it's a beautiful ship, just...

DOVAN: No harm done, Commander. You've had a long night.

J'NAYA: So has half the senior staff. My comm system is paging officers at random to come down here and welcome me aboard. You can imagine how happy Asuka Yubari was teaching me how to say her name at two-thirty in the morning. Please, come in.

(Dovan comes in, the door to the corridor finally closing behind him.)

DOVAN: Well, in my case, it was a fair reminder. I should have come by earlier to see my new chief engineer. (pause) And to warn her about... certain pranksters in her ranks.

J'NAYA: Pranksters? Sir, every subsystem in this room has been totally compromised. I can't sleep, I can't eat, and I'm being publicly humiliated because I can't fix it. It would have taken a competent engineer hours, maybe days, to pull this off. And with a critical assignment like the transporter rescue... no, sir, no Starfleet Academy graduate would find this funny.

DOVAN: Maybe not, but some of our officers came up the enlisted ranks. They may not have our Academy... refinement. (pause) I saw you relieved Kinash Adow of duty today. Why?

J'NAYA: Adow? I can't believe it. She wouldn't.

DOVAN: She has before, and for much less reason.

J'NAYA: Then — with all due respect, sir — why is she still on *Excelsior*?

DOVAN: If I fired every officer with a personality disorder, the *Excelsior* wouldn't have much of a crew. Or a captain, for that matter. (pause) Ensign Adow is a handful, but she is also a genius. In my office, I have a PADD where I keep tally of how many stunts like this she's pulled, plus a tally of how many times she's saved the ship and the lives of every person aboard. As long as the second outnumbers the first, she'll stay.

J'NAYA: Alright. (pause) Then what do you suggest I do, sir?

DOVAN: For tonight? Sleep in my quarters. I have work to catch up on anyway, and we can just cut power to yours until after Mantua. (pause) In the morning? Put Adow back on duty. Apologize. Use her, and get those transporters working. Then, tomorrow or the day after, get revenge. Beam her bed into the marine mess hall while she's sleeping or something.

J'NAYA: I can't do that! It'd undermine my authority, it'd hurt the team's morale, it'd destroy my relationship with Ensign Adow —

DOVAN: Kinash Adow has never made an engineering mistake under my command. Not one. Her instincts are always right. Her skills are incomparable. As far as I'm concerned, she's the pope of main engineering — an infallible oracle of the gods. (pause) My doctor is going to be killed in a few hours if we don't get those transporters. I've been waiting all day for them. Like my friend Skipper Sam Cox says, "You can't kill it yourself, you find a bigger gun." You need Adow.

J'NAYA: I need a team. If I give her a pass on what happened today — especially tonight — then the trust in that team will be broken, and engineering will be under her thumb again. At that point, I may as well go home to the *Totallic*. (pause) Are you ordering me to reinstate Ensign Adow, captain?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: No. It's up to you to run your own department. I just want those transporters. Don't let me down. (pause) Speaking of which, it looks like you're back on shift in two hours. I'll tell my room to let you in. Pleasure meeting you.

J'NAYA: And you, sir.

(Dovan begins to walk away, then stops, turns around.)

DOVAN: Oh, and one other thing. We call our ship the Excelsior, never just "*Excelsior*". She isn't one of those newfangled ships-of-the-line that gets chummy with the crew.

J'NAYA: I didn't realize 'she' had an opinion, sir.

DOVAN: She won't blame you this time, Commander; you didn't know better. (pause) Welcome aboard, Commander J'Naya. And good luck.

J'NAYA: Sir.

(Dovan exits, and the doors swish shut behind him.)

J'NAYA: Two hours. Frak.

SCENE 402-13**LOCATION: ENCHANTED FOREST**

LORHROK: Watch the log there. I almost tripped.

NEEVA: Oh, thanks.

(Neeva stops.)

NEEVA: Alecz. Sir! Stop. (pause) We're walking in circles. That tree is where we stopped for lunch.

(Lorhrok stops.)

LORHROK: It can't be. We've followed the tricorder compass exactly. It must just be a similar-looking tree.

NEEVA: No, it's not. Look.

(She picks up... a crinkly thing.)

LORHROK: Our ration pack wrappers.

NEEVA: When the guards passed by, we got distracted and forgot to vaporize them.

(Lorhrok pulls out his tricorder, opens it, and begins to scan.)

LORHROK: But how did we get back here? The tricorder says that's more than fourteen kilometers away.

NEEVA: Well, which way did we... (pause) ... come.

LORHROK: What?

NEEVA: The log you just helped me over. It's gone.

LORHROK: And that rosebush wasn't there a minute ago.

NEEVA: What's going on?

LORHROK: It's a hologram! This entire forest – the rosebush, the grass, the birds in the trees – the scan says it's all holographic.

NEEVA: Thousands of square meters to conceal... what?

(From a distance, we hear ENORMOUS footsteps tromping through the forest.)

GIANT: *Fee, fi, fo, fum. I smell the blood of foreign scum.*

NEEVA: What in space is that?!

(Lorhrok presses some buttons on his tricorder.)

LORHROK: It's a giant! Like from a storybook! But don't worry – just a hologram!

NEEVA: It's coming right at us! Do you really think the Wizards' holograms have safety protocols?

(Pause.)

LORHROK: You have a point, Commander. (pause) RUN!

(They run!)

GIANT: *Be they live or be they dead, I'll grind their bones to make my bread!*

(There's a huge tearing and crunching sound.)

NEEVA: He just pulled up a tree!

LORHROK: Don't slow down!

NEEVA: We need someplace to hide!

LORHROK: I know!

GIANT: No fair man would say I'm cruel. I just needs me morning gruel

NEEVA: He's catching up!

LORHROK: Well, yeah, with legs like that...! (pause) This'll have to do. Jump!

NEEVA: Down the embankment? It's nine meters!

LORHROK: Slide with it! Geronimo!

(Lorhrok jumps. We hear his body sliding down a rocky embankment, covered with pebbles and gravel.)

NEEVA: If this kills me, I'm haunting you! Whoa!

(She jumps too. She lands in a small brook with a little splash.)

NEEVA: Ohhhh...

LORHROK: Quick! Neeva! Over here! Under the overhang!

NEEVA: Unngh.

(We hear her run over to where Lorhrok is hiding. The Giant is still coming. Lorhrok already has his tricorder out and is clicking away at it quickly.)

NEEVA: What are you doing?

LORHROK: Sonic pulse. It should knock the holograms offline for a few minutes.

GIANT: What? Where'd they go? (pause) Come out, come out, my juicy, fat little morsels.

NEEVA: Fat?

LORHROK: Don't listen to him, Neeva. You're the most [beautiful women I've ever met, pheromones or not.]

NEEVA: I don't need flattery right now; I need [a sonic pulse!]

LORHROK: You need a sonic pulse, I know. (pause) You've got one.

(He presses one last button on the tricorder; the pulse fires the hologram vanishes. Then even more holograms vanish.)

NEEVA: Holy...

LORHROK: ...spast.

(Lorhrok runs a new scan.)

NEEVA: What have they been hiding out here?

LORHROK: I'm detecting large quantities of refined dilithium, pergium, translantean ore... This is a major mining operation.

NEEVA: At least now we know what the Wizards are up to.

LORHROK: They're picking this world clean.

HELMUT: This humble servant scarce believes his ears!

NEEVA: Helmut! Where did you come from?

HELMUT: How bold are you, to stand in judgement over us?

LORHROK: Yes, I judge you, Helmut! The plague you've inflicted on these people will kill thousands – maybe millions! And for what? Power?

HELMUT: The plague? You blame us for your plague? There's no one who can hear your lies, off-worlder!

NEEVA: ...Off-worlder?

HELMUT: The Order of Wizards did not gain Mantua's trust by being fools. Yes, we know you're aliens. It was obvious. But we bided our time. No need to act where the king can see, if you'll just run into our arms anyway.

LORHROK: Except you made a big mistake. (he charges his phaser) I have a gun that could vaporize you and half that refinery. And, now that I've knocked out your holograms, all you have is a long stick.

HELMUT: My magic wand has an independent core. I can produce conjurations and illusions that would slay you instantly... or give you a lifetime of suffering.

LORHROK: Fair enough. But can you cast a spell faster than a phaser beam?

(Neeva also charges her weapon and points it at Helmut.)

NEEVA: Two phaser beams.

HELMUT: Against a dozen Wizards?

NEEVA: I only see the one Wizard, Helmut.

(A dozen wizards "flash" in.)

TURGAS: Lord Helmut! The entire Order stands at your command!

HELMUT: Oh, Turgas, you always take this role so seriously. Try a little more color! The Mantuans adore theatre! Like this!

(Thunder! Followed by the start of some rain.)

HELMUT: That's drama!

NEEVA: Wide-beam dispersal?

LORHROK: We're surrounded. We can't take them all.

HELMUT: Seize them!

TURGAS: Powercage, ready!

LORHROK: Neeva, RUN!

NEEVA: Aye, sir!

(They both run!)

TURGAS: Powercage, fire!

(Neeva smacks into a forcefield! There's a sizzle and she hits the ground!)

NEEVA: Ah!

LORHROK: Neeva!

NEEVA: Some kind of forcefield! We're trapped!

HELMUT: Now you'll be accorded a rare privilege, off-worlders! For who on Mantua does not dream of entering the Wizards' Castle? (pause) Take them to Central Control!

SCENE 402-14**LOCATION: ENGINEERING**

MEYERS: Morning, boss-lady. You sleep alright?

J'NAYA: (with a sigh) Let's nae talk about it. (pause) How are we doing here? We've got three hours; the captain needs a way to beam up the Away Team, or people will die.

JOSHI: Well, Nik and I tried using an interpolation algorithm to split the transporter beam, then reassemble it in our pattern buffer.

NIK D: But the math is enormous. We'd need about a day, day-and-a-half.

J'NAYA: Alright, good try. What else have we come up with? (pause) C'mon, we had Ensign Adow's enhanced scans to help us. Meyers? Tigan?

(Silence.)

MEYERS: Jalin was able to resolve enough of the interference to get a fix on the Away Team's locations.

TIGAN: But transporters...

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: So... we've got nothing.

SCENE 402-16**LOCATION: CAVE OF THE SICK**

(Our heroes are clapped in irons and chains on the wall.)

HELMUT: Remove the blindfolds! Let the aliens see what they have wrought!

(Cloth is removed from the heads of both prisoners.)

NEEVA: They're... dancing.

LORHROK: You have a mining tunnel full of dancing wizards.

TURGAS: If you or your lawyers or their designee will immediately hand over the cure for this plague, we will drop the charges of trespassing and espionage.

LORHROK: The cure? (pause) Why would we have a cure?

HELMUT: Because no sane power deploys a bioweapon without developing a counter-agent! Besides, dear off-worlder, if you don't have a cure, you're going to die down here, of the same plague that's taken thirty-five of my best men.

NEEVA: Your people are infected?

HELMUT: Look around you! Did you think your disease would only kill Mantuans? Our own government has quarantined us here!

LORHROK: This doesn't make any sense. You're the bad guys. You're the ones strip-mining the planet, exploiting the native inhabitants.

HELMUT: That's a lie!

TURGAS: The Inax-Mantua Mineral Company is in full compliance with Council oversight. The certification from our last inspection is available upon request.

LORHROK: What "council"? Where does a corporation get permission to pillage a planet?

HELMUT: P-Counts, obviously. (Pause.) The Perenalthorias Council? Interstellar development? Peacekeeping? (Pause.) Where are you from?

NEEVA: The United Federation of Planets.

HELMUT: Never heard of it.

TURGAS: They're a new corporation, near the rim.

NEEVA: No, we're not. Our mission is exploration, not stealing minerals from primitives for profit.

HELMUT: Since the Great and Blessed Order of Wizards arrived here ten years ago, there hasn't been a war. We've cured diseases. Stabilized their economy. Advanced their technology. And a generous portion of our profits is held in trust for the day when Mantua joins us among the stars. It would never even occur to us to hurt the Mantuans. They're our friends.

NEEVA: Sure, friends you'd have already abandoned if you weren't quarantined with them!

HELMUT: You're not going to get a[way with this, off-worlder, no matter how furiously you shift the blame!]

(Neeva interrupts Helmut by laughing.)

HELMUT: Do I humor you, madam?

(Neeva's attempt to contain her laughter with snorts.)

LORHROK: I'm missing the joke, too, Neeva.

NEEVA: (giggling and chuckling throughout her lines) I, uh... I don't get it either, Alecz. I... I think...

(Neeva continues giggling in the background.)

LORHROK: Maker, she's sick. She's caught your damn disease! Let me out of these chains!

HELMUT: Impossible. She's faking.

LORHROK: You have my scanner! My tricorder! Run a scan and you'll see I'm telling the truth, but let me out so I can help her!

TURGAS: Scans can be faked.

LORHROK: If you don't let me out right now, she'll die! Do you want that on your conscience? (pause) Helmut!

(Helmut presses a button on a control wristband he has. The irons unlock and Alec snatches the tricorder, flipping it open and running a scan on Neeva.)

LORHROK: The energy field's attacking her hypothalamus, just like the princess. Neeva! I'm going to try your pheremone suppressants!

(He closes the tricorder and pulls out a hypospray he's been keeping concealed in his boot. He injects Neeva with it.)

(Neeva gradually stops giggling.)

TURGAS: You do have a cure!

LORHROK: No! Neeva is an Orion; she needs to take drugs to suppress her powerful pheremones. Lucky for us, they work by closing down pathways into and out of the hypothalamus.

NEEVA: (through deep gulps of air) You carry a dose of my suppressant with you?

LORHROK: After Gevinon? I carry three.

NEEVA: So do I.

LORHROK: Keep them handy. I don't know how much time that bought you. The plague is incredibly powerful; use another dose whenever you feel it breaking loose.

TURGAS: Then none of us are responsible for the plague? But if not you... then who?

LORHROK: Maybe it isn't either of you, but someone in these mines started this plague.

HELMUT: It could have been one of your people.

LORHROK: No, it couldn't have. This disease is created by an energy field, not a virus. We tracked that energy field... and it led us here.

TURGAS: (snort) Absurd. Even if that kind of scanner were possible, can you imagine the power requirements for a plague-inducing energy field covering the entire planet? This entire mining facility barely generates three terathaums, and every millijoule is dedicated to getting dilithium out of the ground.

HELMUT: The Divitians have scanners that powerful.

NEEVA: So do we.

(Lorhrok pulls out his tricorder.)

LORHROK: Look.

HELMUT: How marvelous. May I?

LORHROK: Here.

(Helmut presses some buttons.)

HELMUT: Ah. You should take a second look at your readings, off-worlder. This energy field you've tracked isn't coming from our mines.

LORHROK: Yes it is, look. Those coordinates are accurate to within five meters.

HELMUT: Ah, but look at the Z-axis. The signal isn't coming from inside the Wizards' Castle. (pause) It's coming from beneath the Wizard's Castle.

LORHROK: What?

HELMUT: Yes, about one hundred meters below our deepest operations. And you say whatever's down there is causing the entire plague?

LORHROK: That's what our doctor said.

HELMUT: If only we'd had this kind of scanning technology six months ago.

NEEVA: How do we get down there?

HELMUT: Oh, my dear lady, we can't get down there. Whatever's generating this energy field is situated beneath a hundred meters of solid rock.

TURGAS: But, sir —

HELMUT: I'm joking, Turgas. We're a mining company. Of course we can get down there. We just have to drill.

SCENE 402-17**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR – CREW QUARTERS**

(A doorbell sounds.)

ADOW: Come.

(Door opens.)

ADOW: “Commander”?

J’NAYA: Kinash. I thought this would be a good time for that tea we planned.

ADOW: Tea.

(Kestra has already walked over to the food replicator.)

J’NAYA: Tea, chamomile, piping hot. (The computer complies) For you, Ensign? (pause)
Computer, make that two. (The computer replicates another)

(Kestra picks up the saucers with the tea cups on. Then walks over toward the couch.)

ADOW: I’ve never had tea.

J’NAYA: Then this is your lucky – Aw, Janey Mac!

(J’naya trips. Both teacups, and both saucers, shatter on the carpet!)

J’NAYA: (sigh) That’ll come out with a chemcloth.

ADOW: Still looks tastier than that *raktajino* swill.

(J’naya closes the rest of the distance and sits down across from Adow.)

J'NAYA: I need to apologize.

ADOW: To my carpet?

J'NAYA: To you. Your personnel file didn't say you were a wunderkind, but everyone else on this ship tells me that's exactly what you are. I should have taken your advice on the transceiver.

ADOW: And now you need me to solve the transporter problem?

J'NAYA: Actually, the team is hard at work on that, and I think we'll get it online.

ADOW: I've been paying attention? You've got nothing.

J'NAYA: I have a team.

ADOW: So what are you down here for? Doctor Sharp could be killed. They could all be killed. Your "team" is in crunch time.

J'NAYA: I want you to be one of us.

ADOW: You're putting me back on duty.

J'NAYA: When you've served out your week's suspension, yes.

ADOW: I'm still suspended? But... (pause) Oh, I get it. You can't afford to bargain, so you're here to threaten.

J'NAYA: Pardon?

ADOW: (imitating J' naya) "I have three pips and watch how fast I make you a base monkey again and have fun staffing waste reclamation until then." (pause) Sorry, senior officers don't scare me.

J'NAYA: Oi, you really think that's how I work? (pause) No, I came down because Jack's throwing a little welcome-to-the-ship shindig for me, and he forgot to include you on the invite list.

ADOW: Forgot?

J'NAYA: I just wanted to make sure you'd be there. Eighteen hundred tomorrow.

ADOW: But I'm suspended.

J'NAYA: You're suspended from duty, not from the team. As long as I'm here, you're going to be part of everything we do. You'll be there?

ADOW: ... sure.

J'NAYA: Well, I'd better get back to it.

(Kestra stands.)

ADOW: That's all? You don't want to try again with the tea?

J'NAYA: I'd love to, but, like you said: Doctor Sharp's life is on the line. Only thing that comes in front of that... is my team.

(The door opens.)

J'NAYA: Have a cuppa on my tab. I'm pretty sure you have my replicator codes. See you tomorrow.

ADOW: Wait.

(Adow stands, goes to a table near the door, picks up a PADD, and clicks through it quickly.)

ADOW: Here are some notes I put together on the energy field. I have three ideas on breaking through, but the second one's the best. You might find it helpful.

J'NAYA: Thanks, Kinash. I'm sure we will. (pause) And I'll make sure the guys know where it came from.

ADOW: Rub it in Nik's face. Even he should have thought of Number Three ten minutes after the scans came back.

J'NAYA: I'll leave that for you to do – tomorrow. Good morning, Kinash.

(She walks into the corridor, and the door closes behind her.)

SCENE 402-18**LOCATION: MINING RIG**

(The drills and lasers are working, making the drill descend. It is very loud.)

TURGAS: Two meters from source, and we've struck some kind of wall!

HELMUT: Push through, Turgas!

TURGAS: Yes, sir!

(The drills punch through a stone wall, which crumbles, then automatically shut down.)

(The four cautiously walk toward the edge of the platform.)

(Turgas picks up a rock.)

TURGAS: This wall looks ancient, Helmut.

HELMUT: It's man-made, with brick and mortar. But how? Even ten million years ago, this stratum was nowhere near the surface.

LORHROK: Neeva, how are you?

NEEVA: The feeling is getting... intense again, sir. The closer we get to the energy source [the stronger the plague gets.]

LORHROK: Take a dose.

NEEVA: Alec, it's my last one.

LORHROK: We don't know what's beyond that hole. I need you right now, Neeva.

NEEVA: Let's make it quick.

(Neeva injects herself.)

LOCATION: ICONIAN CONTROL ROOM

HELMUT: Scions!

TURGAS: What is this?

LORHROK: A control room of some kind. My tricorder reads (he pulls out his tricorder)... at least a quarter million years old. That glowing sphere in the center – that must be the power source.

HELMUT: It's tremendous!

NEEVA: Sir, these computer panels, this script... it's Iconian, sir!

LORHROK: The Iconians built the gateway that allows us to explore this part of the galaxy, but I've never heard of an intact ground installation.

HELMUTS: The ancients left many small outposts behind in this part of the galaxy, off-worlder. But they are all inert. They have been for millennia. Why is this one active? What switched it on, and why did it decide to give us the plague just a few months ago?

NEEVA: The Iconians were almost god-like by the time they fled our galaxy. It's hard to understand anything they did near the end. The dancing plague could be a punishment. Or an experiment. Or an accident, a side effect of the machine's true purpose.

(Neeva steps over to a console and starts typing.)

LORHROK: Whatever that was. A Starfleet archaeology team could spend a lifetime here. This is the find of the decade.

HELMUT: If we can turn it off first.

LORHROK: Right, of course.

NEEVA: I have something! (pause) Yeah, these are the shutdown controls. (pause) No, wait. No. That's not good.

LORHROK: What's wrong?

NEEVA: Whatever this thing is, it's like a nuclear reactor — self-sustaining. Once it's on, you can't just switch it off. The "shutdown protocol" ruptures a magma pocket beneath this chamber, flooding it with molten lava. That destroys the system.

LORHROK: And us along with it.

NEEVA: Helmut, how fast can that drilling rig get us out of here once the lava starts flowing?

HELMUT: Turgas?

TURGAS: Top speed is one meter per second.

LORHROK: Then we'll have to leave it behind. Neeva, can we outrun the lava on foot?

NEEVA: Yes, we should. But that tunnel we just dug will collapse and seal in the lava very quickly, trapping anyone on the wrong side.

TURGAS

She's right. If we make it out, it will be with no time to spare.

LORHROK: So much for archaeology. Let's end the plague. Is everyone ready?

NEEVA: On your order, sir.

HELMUT: We're ready to run.

LORHROK: Now, Neeva.

(Neeva presses a final command sequence and the ground begins to AGGRESSIVELY RUMBLE. Caps pop off of pipes near the power source with metallic thunks, venting hot steam.)

LORHROK: Out! Everybody out!

(Turgas and Helmut dash for it, scrabbling over the metal dig platform then running over rock toward the escape.)

NEEVA: Alecz, help!

(Alecz runs to her side.)

LORHROK: What's wrong?

NEEVA: Look at my feet, Alecz. I'm dancing.

LORHROK: We need to get out of here, Neeva.

NEEVA: I can't. I can't stop. It's — (she laughs) Never mind! You can't help me! I'm — (she giggles.)

LORHROK: Neeva! NEEVA! (pause) Turgas! Helmut! I need help!

HELMUT: *There's no time! You have to leave her!*

LORHROK: No! Fine, Neeva. You need to dance? We'll dance out of here. Step. Step. Glide. Can you hear me?

LOCATION: DRILLING RIG

(The magma rises out of cracks in the ground.)

LORHROK: C'mon. The lava's destroying the control room. We have to stay ahead of it. Step, step, glide.

(The rumbling gets worse.)

HELMUT: Off-worlder, hurry! The cave is collapsing behind us! Your friend is dead already! **Run!**

LORHROK: Go! I'm fine!

(They make slow progress. In a final conflagration, the power source explodes. Rocks fall, and the tunnel is sealed. The lava continues to rise.)

HELMUT: *Off-worlder!*

LORHROK: And there goes the tunnel.

NEEVA: Uhn... Alecz?

LORHROK: I'm here. The plague's power source just exploded. I guess you're cured. (pause) But we didn't make it out before the cave-in.

NEEVA: The lava?

LORHROK: Rising. No way out.

NEEVA: So, we're dead?

LORHROK: Looks that way.

NEEVA: Why'd you wait for me?

LORHROK: Because the person I became on Gevinon would have left you behind. And... I don't want to live as that person. I'd rather die as Alecz Lorhrok.

NEEVA: Well, I'm glad you figured out what to believe in. Shame it had to happen right now. How much of this wall do you think we can phaser away before we burn to death?

LORHROK: That lava's rising at about two meters per second.

NEEVA: Still, worth a shot. Let's go out fighting.

LORHROK: You never seemed like the "blaze of glory" type.

NEEVA: With all due respect, sir, you don't know me very well.

LORHROK: That's becoming more and more apparent, Commander. (He charges his phaser) Ready. Aim.

(Two near-simultaneous transporter beams grab them and they disappear.)

SCENE 402-19**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR TRANSPORTER ROOM 3**

MEYERS: Patterns verified, boss-lady! We have 'em!

J'NAYA: Good work, Jack. I'm going to take the materialization nice and slow...

(Lorhrok and Neeva materialize on the transporter pad, slower than usual.)

J'NAYA: Bridge, this is Transporter Room Three. We have them.

DOVAN: *Acknowledged, Commander. Senior staff debrief at eighteen hundred. Bridge out.*

NEEVA: They found us. We're alive.

LORHROK: A very timely rescue, Commander J'naya. I think you're going to fit in nicely here.

J'NAYA: It wasn't me, sir. Thank my team.

LORHROK: Where's Melissa?

J'NAYA: We brought her home first, sir. Her pattern was a lot easier through the interference, being aboveground and all. She's waiting for you both in sickbay, and promised you'd regret it should you fail to promptly appear.

NEEVA: She probably means it, too.

LORHROK: Tell her we're on our way.

(Neeva and Lorhrok step off the pad and exit the transporter room.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

LORHROK: I'm sorry.

NEEVA: Yes?

LORHROK: I shouldn't have avoided you after Gevinon. It was... Simon Westlake died there. He was my friend. And he was just a boy. You were there. And then what happened in the shuttle... it was wonderful. Too wonderful. I didn't think I had the right to feel so good with Simon's blood on my hands. So I pushed you away. When really I think I needed you more than anything.

NEEVA: I'm glad... that it meant something to you.

LORHROK: Can I have a second chance? To start fresh?

NEEVA: You've had a second chance. You missed it.

LORHROK: What am I up to, then?

NEEVA: I believe this will be your fifth chance.

LORHROK: Oh.

NEEVA: You're getting better.

(Pause.)

LORHROK: We could get dinner. I... want to get dinner, with you, and talk. If that's something that still interests you.

NEEVA: Honestly, Lorchrok, you haven't done much to interest me. I don't even like most of what I've seen. (pause) But... there's something else about you. Something I've glimpsed once or twice, but... (pause) I'll give you one date. One chance to impress me.

LORHROK: And if I do?

NEEVA: Then I'll give you one more date. And we'll keep going until you stop impressing me.

LORHROK: I have some very impressive engineering humor.

NEEVA: Engineering humor is terrible.

LORHROK: Is the warp core leaking? Because you look radiant.

NEEVA: And that was your fifth chance. On to your sixth?

LORHROK: I appreciate it. Nineteen-thirty, the Delta Lounge?

NEEVA: Why so late? Debrief won't go that long.

LORHROK: There's something I have to do first.

SCENE 402-20**LOCATION: READY ROOM**

DOVAN: And I keep telling Admiral Parker, there's nothing left down there, lava doesn't leave witnesses, but he's still making us send our full archaeology team to study the site. Admirals are stubborn, Skipper Cox.

COX: *Almost as stubborn as starship captains.*

DOVAN: (sigh) The point is well-taken, Skipper. And here I thought the way we fearlessly rescued you and your crew last month -- after decades lost in space -- would earn me a few indulgences.

COX: *Funny. The way I remember it, you showed up and ruined a perfectly good escape plan, then left it to us and the Scions to pull your bacon out of the fire. (pause) Besides, what are friends for if you can't point out their glaring character flaws?*

DOVAN: Oh, as if you're a paragon of flexibility, Skipper. I thought I had friends so I could complain about admirals with them.

COX: *You know, Admiral Parker might have a point this time.*

DOVAN: How so?

COX: *Right after I took over as skipper of the S.S. Anbar, we bumped into a Sikaar research fleet. They were working on a weapon that would prevent buggers – sorry, “extragalactic neural parasites” is what Starfleet Intelligence is calling them – from taking over anyone's brain.*

DOVAN: Did it work?

COX: *We never found out. They had to shut down the experiments because of, quote, “bizarre behaviour” on the homeship. (pause) Sounds a little like your dancing plague.*

DOVAN: A little. But ours was Iconian, and enveloped a planet.

COX: (sigh) *I guess it is a little thin. I've been... reminiscing a lot, lately.*

DOVAN: How is life on Earth, Skipper? (pause) Don't tell me you're not enjoying it. You spent your whole life trying to get your crew home.

COX: *You retired once. How'd that go for you?*

(Pause.)

DOVAN: I tried to take up gardening. Even my fiancée thought that was a bad idea.

COX: *Fiancée?*

DOVAN: I had a lot of bad ideas when I retired. Some of us aren't prepared for paradise.

COX: *A lot of us, I think. Maybe that's why we serve on starships.*

DOVAN: Well, this just got too deep for me! I have to log off anyway. Subspace bandwidth is at a premium out here, and Lieutenant Lorhrok reserved some time tonight.

COX: *I'll let you go, then. Always a pleasure.*

DOVAN: Night, Skipper.

(He closes the subspace link.)

SCENE 402-22**LORHROK'S QUARTERS**

LORHROK: Computer, any new messages?

COMPUTER: *Three unplayed messages, from Admiral Ian Westlake.*

LORHROK: Delete them, like the others.

(An acknowledging beep.)

(Pause.)

LORHROK: And... then establish a connection to Admiral Westlake.

(More affirmative beeps, followed by the Starfleet equivalent of Skype ringing. While it rings, Lorchrok takes a deep breath to steady himself.)

(The viewer pops on.)

WESTLAKE: *Lieutenant Lorchrok. I've been expecting your call.*

LORHROK: I know. (pause) Admiral, your son, Simon, [was nothing less than the most loved person in the Engineering department.]

WESTLAKE: *You swore you'd keep him safe. You gave me your word as a Starfleet Officer, Lieutenant. (pause) Simon wasn't even in Starfleet. He was just a boy. A boy who wanted to go exploring.*

LORHROK: I know, sir. (pause) I know.