

Starship: Excelsior

"Only Murder"

(Season 4, Episode 4)

by James Heaney and Baxter Turnham

Transcribed by Peter Stine

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

SCENE 404-01**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

(Door hisses open. Dovan steps out of the turbolift, moves to his chair.)

LORHROK: Captain on the bridge.

DOVAN: Number one. Is everything ready for the conference?

LORHROK: Agendas printed, silverware's polished.

ROL: The Zath and Norkova diplomatic ships are on final approach.

DOVAN: Good. Lieutenant Yubari, signal the delegations. Inform them that our ambassador will meet them in the stateroom.

LORHROK: Ambassador? I wasn't aware we'd received diplomatic replacements for Commander Underwood, sir.

DOVAN: We haven't, Ambassador.

LORHROK: Beg your pardon?

DOVAN: Mister Rol, you're Ambassador Lohrok's attaché. You'll escort him wherever he goes.

ROL: Aye, sir.

DOVAN: Alec, you'll do great. You're a born diplomat, you already have a rapport with Speaker Tsur, and you'll have Rol's help. He was basically a diplomat.

ROL: I was a special operations infiltration specialist, captain.

DOVAN: Wasn't it your Hitler who said infiltration is a continuation of diplomacy by other means?

ROL: It was von Clausewitz, sir. And no, he didn't.

DOVAN: Some important human, anyway.

LORHROK: On second thought, if the alternative is your diplomacy, the Norkovans are lucky to have me.

DOVAN: That's the spirit.

YUBARI: Sir, incoming message from the Norkovan vessel.

DOVAN: On speaker.

SPEAKER TSUR: *Captain, I had hoped we might be able to see the survivors before we begin negotiating over them?*

DOVAN: We can certainly discuss it, Speaker Tsur, but if the Norkovans are allowed access to the crash survivors, Minister Shawn and the Zath must be allowed equal access.

SPEAKER TSUR: *The Zath would take any opportunity to murder those children!*

DOVAN: Yes... so you keep saying.

YUBARI: Captain, the Zath are hailing.

DOVAN: Of course they are. Patch them in. Why not?

MINISTER SHAWN: *Captain, I hope my Norkovan counterpart isn't trying to get a head start on the negotiations. Eighteen Zath lives are at stake, and we'll defend our citizens no matter the cost.*

SPEAKER TSUR: *Unless they're collaborators, Minister. Then you'll murder them and their families, no matter the cost.*

MINISTER SHAWN: *Since when have you cared about innocent Zath blood, Speaker? I missed your concerns when you carpet-bombed Arjana!*

SPEAKER TSUR: *We attacked military targets that threatened [the people of Norkova Prime.]*

MINISTER SHAWN: *You bombed Zath civilians, Zath hospitals, Zath schools, because you want Zath blood and Zath death!*

DOVAN: Gentlemen! (pause) You both claim to have the best interests of the crash survivors at heart. You both claim the other wants all the *Gralik Hann* survivors dead. Might we save the debate for the negotiating table?

MINISTER SHAWN: (taking a slow breath) *Of course, Captain. You're right. I apologize for my outburst. Our delegation is prepared to land. Minister Shawn for the Zath, out.*

SPEAKER TSUR: *I'm confident you'll vindicate our claim for asylum, captain. Speaker Tsur for the Norkova, out.*

DOVAN: Lorchrok, does it still count as humanitarian aid when the participants are all horrible people?

LORHROK: I think it's at least half-credit.

YUBARI: Diplomatic ships are entering the shuttle bay. Touching down. (pause) Wait, Captain? Something's wrong.

SCENE 404-02**LOCATION: MAIN ENGINEERING**

MEYERS: Landing cycle complete. Shuttle crew, this is Engineering: stand down blue alert.

RANDOM CREW #404-1: *Aye, chief. Shuttle crews, standing down.*

J'NAYA: Textbook performance. Send my compliments to the shuttle crews, Jack. Ensign Adow! Can you [run a diagnostic for me?]

ADOW: Oh my God! The shuttlebay! It just [exploded!]

(A Massive explosion rocks the ship. Alarm klaxons blare, consoles and power conduits explode, people and debris are thrown to the deck.)

(Adow and J'naya are slammed into each other (and a wall) by the force of the explosion. Meyers is also thrown to the ground. They all cry out.)

J'NAYA: (She slaps her commbadge) Bridge, there's been an explosion in main shuttlebay. (she slaps the badge again) Bridge! Can you hear me? Kinash! Are [you alright?]

(A klaxon sounds.)

ADOW: (getting up) Oh, no. Get off. GET OFF!

(J'naya gets to her feet.)

ADOW: VENT THE WARP CORE! DO IT NOW! NO, NOT EJECT! VENT IT! MANUALLY!

MEYERS: (getting up) What's going on?

J'NAYA: Do what she says, Chief!

ADOW: **NOW!**

(Adow slides to a stop, and slams into the side of the warp core with a grunt.)

ADOW: Break glass in case of emergency?

(Adow shouts and shatters the glass with her elbow and presses a big computer button. A short, loud alarm is her reply, and then a whooshing noise as the warp core is opened to hard vacuum. The power level drops, we only hear sparks and people's groans.)

J'NAYA: Warp core vent complete!

(Adow is already running to the other side of the room.)

ADOW: Jack, help me shut down the reactors!

MEYERS: Which ones?

ADOW: **All of them!**

MEYERS: We'll be powerless!

(J'naya, running, finally gets to them.)

J'NAYA: We'll be alive, Jack. DO IT!

MEYERS: What's going on?

ADOW: Hurry UP!

(All three hurry across some debris to another panel. It snaps open and they start throwing big breakers.)

ADOW: That explosion * was right next to the impulse engines. If they're * powered up, and one of them was hit... *

J'NAYA: Kaboom. We go * supernova.

MEYERS: You're even shutting down the backups!

J'NAYA: * We can't risk a plasma flashback on a hot grid. * (pause) One left.

MEYERS: We'll have absolutely no power. No life support.

J'NAYA: Jack, we'll have about an hour before the ship freezes from the outside in. It's not much, but it should be enough. (pause) ALL HANDS, BRACE FOR ZERO-GRAVITY!

(She flips the last breaker.)

ADOW: So. We're under attack, the ship's dead in space.

J'NAYA: And we'll all be dead in an hour. (pause) Start the clock, Jack.

Each * means a character has thrown a breaker switch (they grunt while doing so; the breakers are big).

MAIN CREDITS (SCENE 404-98)

LORHROK: *And Samuel Gillis as First Officer Alecz Lorhrok.*

NEEVA: *With Kennedy as Lieutenant Commander Neeva.*

YUBARI: *Caitlin Heaney as Lieutenant Asuka Yubari*

SHARP: *Emily Potter as Doctor Melissa Sharp*

NARRATOR: *Tonight's Episode: "Only Murder", by James Heaney and Baxter Turnham*

SCENE 404-03

LOCATION: PORT NACELLE CRAWLSPACE (FLASHBACK)

NARRATOR: *Twelve hours ago.*

(Some wine is poured into a glass.)

NEEVA : You know? I'd rather... I don't want to talk about that. If that's okay.

LORHROK: Why?

NEEVA: I just don't? My relationship with my mother is a little personal?

LORHROK: Okay.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: What?

LORHROK: It's just...

NEEVA: What?

LORHROK: That's the third time you've said that tonight.

NEEVA: It is not.

LORHROK: So when I asked if you ever wanted to have kids?

NEEVA: But that's --!

LORHROK: See?

NEEVA : ...personal. Yes, I do see. (pause) Why do you want to know any of this?

LORHROK: Because you're a wonderful and confusing person, Commander, and I want to get to know you... personally.

NEEVA: What's confusing?

LORHROK: Why you let me ask you out again, for one, after what happened on our date to Marine Country.

NEEVA: Like I said, tenth time's the charm. And you did promise me a picnic in your favorite place on the ship.

LORHROK: So what do you think?

NEEVA: It's beautiful. How did you know there was even a view from way back here in the port nacelle? It's not on the *Excelsior's* specs.

LORHROK: Well, some things you learn from reading the specs, some things you learn crawling through the gray lady on your hands and knees. When the ship goes to warp, for a split second, you can actually see the warp field forming from here.

NEEVA: Wow.

LORHROK: But this isn't my favorite place on the ship.

NEEVA: What?

LORHROK: Move about... 20 centimeters to the left.

NEEVA: Whoa! Hey! Where'd the gravity go?

LORHROK: They call it the sweet spot. Every ship has one. But some are harder to find than others. (pause) You want to come back down, or should I float dessert up to you?

NEEVA: Send it up. (pause) Send yourself up, too. The view's even better upside-down. And I'm gonna want a fella's arm around me when we drop to impulse.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-04**LOCATION: TURBOLIFT**

(No power, but we hear some creaking and groaning.)

NEEVA: (groans) ...gonna want a fella's... arm around me... (groans)

THE MAJOR: (groans) Ma'am?

NEEVA: What...? Happened? Wait. (pause) The turbolift. The explosion. Computer, what happened to the gravity? (pause) Computer? (pause) Major, are you alright?

THE MAJOR: Yes, ma'am. Just winded. Where are we?

NEEVA: Turbolift. Somewhere between Deck Eight and Deck Sixteen. We're completely powerless.

THE MAJOR: And that sound, ma'am?

NEEVA: The turbolift is straining against its magnetic tracks. It could snap off at any second.

THE MAJOR: No gravity, ma'am. At least we won't plummet to our deaths.

NEEVA: And when they turn the gravity back on?

(Pause.)

THE MAJOR: I see your point, ma'am. Shall I get the ceiling hatch open?

NEEVA: Please. I'll help.

(They push off, float up, and start trying to pull the release latches.)

THE MAJOR: Ma'am? Who do you think did it?

NEEVA: The explosion? Maybe it was an accident. Maybe it had nothing to do with the Zath survivors.

THE MAJOR: I don't think we can afford to be generous here, ma'am.

NEEVA: (takes a breath) No, I suppose not. It all goes back to the wreck of the *Gralik Hann*.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-06**LOCATION: DWARF PLANET – BARREN SURFACE (FLASHBACK)**

(Rol and Lorhrok are making their way across the gravelly surface of a dead rock at low gravity. Both are in EV suits, with heavy space-boots on. Rol has a tricorder out.)

LORHROK: *I can't believe we've stumbled into another Iconian ruin. Especially not on a dead rock like this.*

ROL: *Of course not. I don't believe it, either.*

LORHROK: *You don't think our readings are accurate?*

ROL: *Oh, I'm sure they are. But what makes you think we're "stumbling" into anything out here?*

LORHROK: *What do you mean? We're flying full speed into a part of the galaxy Starfleet's never even probed.*

ROL: *Of course we are. On a course pre-determined by Admiral Parker.*

LORHROK: *Aren't you being a little paranoid?*

ROL: *Are you really asking me that?*

LORHROK: *Okay, point. The ex-spy gets to be a little paranoid.*

ROL: *Sir, be fair. I'm being a lot paranoid.*

LORHROK: *Why do you think these ruins have started waking up?*

ROL: *We've visited five "awakened" ruins since Mantua. As far as we can date it, all of them started "waking up" at the same time – around stardate five-nine-seven-zero-four.*

LORHROK: *Why? What happened that week?*

ROL: *Hang on. I've got something on my tricorder.*

LORHROK: *Iconian technology?*

ROL: *No. (pause) Lifesigns!*

LORHROK: *What?*

ROL: *I don't think they're Iconian; they're humanoid – and very faint. Come on! This way!*

(He has already taken off across the surface. Lorchrok follows. They run for a short while.)

ROL: *In that crater, sir!*

LORHROK: *It's a crashed starship!*

ROL: *Not a very big one, sir.*

LORHROK: *Not a very intact one, either. I'm surprised this little guy didn't break up on impact. We can climb through this hull breach...*

(They do so.)

LOCATION: CRASHED SHIP

LORHROK: (grunt) (pause) *There's so much sunlight coming through the hull.*

(Rol closes and puts away the tricorder.)

ROL: (grunt) *I think most of it disintegrated. Just this compartment survived – and we're lucky it didn't turn into a debris field ten thousand meters long. We'll probably never know... uhn!... what brought her down.*

(Creak, groan, BANG!)

LORHROK: *You alright?*

ROL: *Yeah, just getting this debris out of the way. Even in low gravity it's a workout. (Some more debris hits a wall) There. After you, sir.*

LORHROK: *HELLO?*

(There is a slight echo.)

LORHROK: *Are you sure about those life signs? All I see are these storage containers.*

ROL: *Sir... that's where the life signs were coming from.*

LORHROK: *What? (pause) Rol, help me get a look inside this one.*

ROL: *Yes, sir.*

(Rol catches up with Lorchrok.)

LORHROK: *Looks like a viewport control... here.*

(Latches release; a swish of escaping air; the contents of the pod roll out automatically.)

LORHROK: *Oh!*

ROL: *She's in suspended animation. That explains the faint readings.*

LORHROK: *Do you recognize the species?*

ROL: *Nope. But I think all of these containers are stasis pods. (pause) We just rescued more than a dozen people, sir.*

LORHROK: *Well... as Captain Dovan would say...*

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-06**LOCATION: BRIDGE**

DOVAN: Jehosephat! (coughing) Lights! I need lights!

LORHROK: We've lost gravity!

DOVAN: Yeah, Number One? What was your first hint?

ROL: Hang on. I've got a flashlight from the emergency kit.

(He presses a clicky button to turn on the futuristic flashlight which buzzes.)

DOVAN: And the light shineth on all Kobol's children. Ah! Not in my face, Bev.

ROL: Wait. Where's Lieutenant Yubari?

YUBARI: (Coughing heavily) Uhhhn. Back here! Hang on!

(She pushes herself up from under some debris where she was caught, and floats freely.)

YUBARI: That's better. Debris had me pinned.

DOVAN: You alright?

YUBARI: (coughing subsides a little) Yeah, fine. Aces.

DOVAN: Don't lie to me.

YUBARI: I'm a little sore (cough), bruised like a side of beef... but I'm fit for duty, sir.

DOVAN: Really?

YUBARI: Really. Ah! Hey, Rol, watch the light.

ROL: Sorry!

DOVAN: Let's see if anything else is working.

(Dovan smacks his commbadge, but it's dead.)

LORHROK: If we don't have gravity, we sure don't have communicators, but that's the least of it.

DOVAN: What?

LORHROK: With gravity gone, life support's probably out, too.

ROL: So we have less than an hour until we suffocate?

YUBARI: And/or freeze.

LORHROK: Yes. To both. But what worries me is... the structural integrity fields are down.

YUBARI: Son of a Borg...

DOVAN: That's worse than suffocating? Yubari? Lorhrok? Why are you giving me that look?

SCENE 404-07**LOCATION: MAIN ENGINEERING**

(Some panels are still sparking.)

(All three here are making their way up a ladder.)

J'NAYA: Ever wonder why we fly circles around Klingon ships of the same tonnage, Jack? It's because Klingons build their ships to hold themselves together.

(The entire *Excelsior* hull groans.)

ADOW: A few decades ago, some damn fool idiot of an Admiral decided that if we just used force fields to hold the ships together, we'd gain a great big mass advantage.

J'NAYA: The less mass a ship displaces, less power you need to move it, more agile ships. The problem is... (she grunts)

(hatch opens)

J'NAYA: Ah. The problem is that you wind up with starship designs that can't support their own weight.

(She climbs into the Jefferies Tube.)

J'NAYA: Let me put it this way: you know those little metal cans that beverages come in?

MEYERS: Sure, boss-lady.

J'NAYA: What happens when you stand on an empty one?

MEYERS: I crush it.

J'NAYA: But if there were a forcefield inside the can, supporting your weight.

MEYERS: Like a structural integrity field...

ADOW: Precisely. We just turned ours off, which makes us the can. Now get out of the way, Meyers.

MEYERS: Wait. Where you going?

(The entire *Excelsior* hull groans.)

J'NAYA: Hear that? That's a septillion-kilogram foot named Zerquix, and it's already started stepping on our hull. We have to get at least one auxiliary reactor back online, or the *Excelsior* will get torn apart long before we freeze.

SCENE 404-08**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(We hear a turbolift door being clawed open by Neeva and the Major.)

NEEVA: I didn't expect opening doors to be so hard in zero gee. Where are we?

THE MAJOR: Deck twelve, section four. Who's that, ma'am?

NEEVA: Ensign Wilder, from stellar cartography. Ensign, can you hear me? Are you al —
SPAST!

THE MAJOR: Hold her absolutely still! Don't let the blood get in your eyes!

(Neeva coughs with her arms over her face.)

THE MAJOR: Are you alright, ma'am?

NEEVA: I never realized how much worse blood could be without gravity. Try to get some of this out of the air, will you? I'm fine, Major. I just wish I could say the same for Ensign Wilder.

THE MAJOR: Ma'am... she wasn't killed in the explosion.

NEEVA: Major, there's two feet of metal beam sticking out of her back. She didn't die of cancer.

THE MAJOR: You're right, the shrapnel killed her, but look here, beneath the bloodstains.

(The Major brushes his hand against the metal bulkhead.)

NEEVA: Disruptor burns.

THE MAJOR: The shrapnel came from close-range weapons fire.

NEEVA: We've been boarded.

THE MAJOR: We have to get to Marine Country; we may be the first to know about the intruders.

NEEVA: Yes, you do, Major, but you'll have to go without me. Somebody's got to restart the fusion generators, or this ship will crack like a *taspar* egg.

THE MAJOR: Why not wait for engineering?

NEEVA: Because there's a good chance everyone in Engineering is dead, Major.

(Pause.)

THE MAJOR: Ma'am... Yes, I understand. I'll escort you as far as I can. Be careful, ma'am.

NEEVA: You too.

THE MAJOR: So, who do you think is behind it?

NEEVA: Me? The Norkovans, probably.

THE MAJOR: I agree.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-09**LOCATION: CITY – HIGH BALCONY (FLASHBACK)**

TSUR: I hope you understand why I asked you to bring our discussion out here to the balcony, Lieutenant Lorhrok. It seems improper to speak evil on such a lovely evening. One of Norkova's great naturalists said that we have such large eyes so we may see all we have been blessed with, but some things I prefer we did not have to see.

LORHROK: No doubt, Speaker Tsur, and it is a lovely reception. But we rescued a ship today – I think you called it the *Gralik Hann*? – and now the *Excelsior* has eighteen survivors aboard, all in suspended animation. None of them look like you or your species. It's urgent that we learn whatever you can tell us.

TSUR: It is a long story. Not a happy one, I'm afraid.

ROL: We came a long way to hear it.

TSUR: Yes. Well. (pause) This world was not always the home of the Norkova. We came from far away – a mighty and peaceful people. But, nineteen years ago, there was a... conflagration. The "war in heaven", we called it. Our republic was destroyed, our worlds consumed by two great enemies beyond imagining. Only a few million survived, sent in great ark ships to find a new home.

LORHROK: Sent here?

TSUR: Not at first. (pause) For seven years, our survivors – just a fraction of a fraction of the Norkovans who lived before the war – searched for a new home... but, everywhere we sought refuge, we were refused. Finally, our supplies dwindling, our hasty ships falling apart around us, we came here.

ROL: To this planet.

TSUR: It was called Zathana then. Its furry inhabitants called themselves the Zath. You met a few at the reception tonight.

LORHROK: They looked like the survivors we rescued.

TSUR: The *Gralik Hann* was a Zath ship, yes. I'm coming to that.

ROL: So the Zath gave you refuge on this planet. A new home?

TSUR: Mmm. Not quite. In fact, the Zath government denied us, just like all the others. But it was too late. Our engines had given out. When we were to break orbit, we crash-landed instead. Some of the Zath said that we were invading the planet, planning to breed a new generation of Norkova and seize their homeworld. (pause) But what else could we do? Die?

LORHROK: There was a war, wasn't there?

TSUR: I'm sorry to say there was. Zath radicals raised an army. They wanted us off their planet – but, since we had nowhere to go and no way to get there, they decided to settle for genocide. They outnumbered us, but we still had some of our advanced technology, and some Zath were willing to work with us. After nine months of hard fighting, we won the peace. The radicals retreated into exile on Zerquix.

LORHROK: Not a very nice place to be exiled. Zerquix is your star's closest planet. Barely M-class. Extreme temperatures, devastating weather... all exacerbated by what looks like recent orbital bombardment.

TSUR: The malcontents have waged war against us — all of us — ever since. They've turned their backs on the other Zath who stayed behind here. Call them "collaborators."

ROL: People are dancing on the lawn below. It doesn't seem like you're at war. Zathana is teeming with life.

TSUR: Norkova. This world is called Norkova now.

LORHROK: We profusely apologize, Speaker.

TSUR: It is a good world. Sometimes the Zerquix rebels cast a pall over it. A shopping mall was bombed last week; we were just barely able to evacuate in time. When they do harm our citizens, of course, we are forced to retaliate against their military installations, which restores peace, for a time.

LORHROK: Where does the *Gralik Hann* fit into this?

TSUR: A small transport lifted off from Zerquix without authorization. At first, we ordered it to turn back. Then, military intelligence learned that the passengers were refugees — accused of collaboration and sentenced to death by their illegal government.

LORHROK: The ship had children aboard.

TSUR: Under Zath law, the *nija*, families of criminals incur their punishments by blood guilt.

ROL: So who fired on the ship?

TSUR: Just as we transmitted clearance for them to pass the Zerquix containment perimeter, their port baffle plating exploded. A bomb had been planted on board, no doubt by order of

the Zath government. The *Gralik* spun off-course. By the time we organized a search, there was no sign of it. We assumed she had been destroyed – not the first refugee ship the Zath have murdered.

ROL: That's horrible.

TSUR: We mourned their loss. Now that we know they live, I formally request their repatriation to the Zath community on Norkova.

LORHROK: Until we can sort out for certain who tried to kill them, the *Gralik Hann* survivors will stay aboard the *Excelsior*. Your government is invited to send representatives to our ship for a summit, where we will arrive at a resolution.

TSUR: You should be able to confirm my entire story right now. A metallurgical scan of the port baffle [will reveal an internal explosion, not an external one.]

ROL: Unfortunately, Speaker, that whole section of the ship disintegrated when it crashed into the dwarf planet we found her on. The forensic evidence was all destroyed.

TSUR: Gentlemen, do you seriously doubt my word in favor of a gang of terrorists?

LORHROK: With respect, Speaker, when lives are at stake, we doubt everyone.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-10**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE**

DOVAN: No. Absolutely not. My place [is on the bridge.]

LORHROK: Is in command. You can't command the *Excelsior* from a dead bridge.

DOVAN: I can't command it from a dead Engineering, either.

YUBARI: Captain...

ROL: No, wait, he's right. He needs power, communications, control.

LORHROK: Which don't exist on this ship right now.

ROL: No, they don't. But what about a different ship?

LORHROK: Such as?

ROL: The captain's yacht, sir.

DOVAN: The *McKinley*.

LORHROK: Of course! It's docked on the other side of the ship from main shuttlebay; it should be undamaged. Once you turn it on, you'll have sensors, communications, damage reports...

DOVAN: Then let's get going. Alec, help me with this door.

LORHROK: Hold on. I'm gathering up the rest of the emergency kits.

DOVAN: Don't worry, then, I'll get it myself.

(Dovan forces the door open.)

DOVAN: Hello? Hey, I think there's someone in this turboshaft.

YUBARI: Captain, let me [make sure it's safe].

DOVAN: Hello, can you hear me?

YUBARI: Captain, get back from [there].

COMMANDO #1: Die, Federation!

(Gunfire (yes, semiautomatic gunfire) rings out. Dovan is hit! He yells.)

LORHROK: Captain!

(Yubari is running to the turbolift, whipping out and charging her phaser.)

YUBARI: Returning fire!

(She fires into the turboshaft)

YUBARI: Direct hit! Target is neutralized!

LORHROK: Alcar, are you alright?

DOVAN: (groans) My arm. Ahhh...

(Rol pulls out a tricorder.)

ROL: Who fired that shot?

YUBARI: Lone gunman in the turboshaft. Must be part of a boarding party, got separated.

ROL: Norkova or Zath?

YUBARI: I don't know. I think he was armored. He's halfway down the turboshaft by now. Captain, I told you, [you shouldn't have left yourself vulnerable like that.]

DOVAN: (groans) I know you did, Yubari. Agggh. I promise to listen to you (labored breathing) from now on. Nobody told me that getting shot hurts more in zero-gee.

ROL: I'm pretty sure that's not a thing, sir.

DOVAN: I'm pretty sure I've been shot more'n you, Bev. Trust me on this.

ROL: It actually hurts more because the disruptor beam that hit your arm is spreading — feeding on your tissues.

DOVAN: You mean I'm still being shot?

ROL: Yes. You're being torn apart from the inside out. You'll be dead in ten minutes.

YUBARI: We have to get him to sickbay.

ROL: There's no time.

LORHROK: Mister Rol, what if we knock him out? Kill his metabolism? Will that slow the disruption?

ROL: It should. Might buy us enough time to get him to a doctor.

LORHROK: Get a hypospray from the emergency kit. Hit him with the strongest sedative you have.

ROL: Aye, sir.

(Rol extracts and starts programming a hypospray.)

LORHROK: Captain Alcar Dovan, you are relieved of duty.

DOVAN: Uhhnn... I stand... relieved.

ROL: Injecting sedative.

(Rol activates the hypospray against Dovan's neck.)

DOVAN: You'll do great... Alec....

ROL: He's unconscious.

LORHROK: Alright. Miss Yubari, get him to sickbay, then link up with your security force and defend the ship.

YUBARI: Aye, sir.

LORHROK: Mr. Rol, what about the Renegades?

ROL: If they followed protocol, all standby fighters did a cold launch from the fighter bay when power went out.

LORHROK: You're their commander. You should get to them as quickly as you can.

YUBARI: What about you, captain?

LORHROK: Acting captain. I need to get to the *McKinley*.

YUBARI: You should have an escort.

(She activates her phaser.)

LORHROK: Get the capt – Get Dovan to sickbay. That's a direct order. How is he?

YUBARI: Out cold, sir.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-11**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR (FLASHBACK)**

(Lorhrok and Dovan are walking.)

LORHROK: You really shouldn't.

DOVAN: While you've been getting briefed on the Norkova, Neeva's been studying the big picture. History, customs, language. And Zath custom dictates...

LORHROK: There are regulations about beaming alone into a dangerous situation.

DOVAN: I take full responsibility.

LORHROK: Of course you do.

DOVAN : Don't worry, Lieutenant. I want you to keep right on quoting regulations at me.

LORHROK: So you know how many you've violated?

DOVAN: Somebody's gotta keep score.

(A door opens. Someone comes out.)

SHARP: Oh, Alcar?

DOVAN: Melissa?

(Everyone takes a couple more steps then stop.)

SHARP: I thought you'd already beamed down.

DOVAN: Was just about to. (pause) Anything you were planning to tell Alecz, you can tell me.

SHARP: Well, um. The Zath we rescued from the *Gralik Hann*?

DOVAN: Yes? Did you manage to revive them?

SHARP: No, the stasis pods are still thawing out. (pause) But they're all healthy Zath. Nine men, five women, four children. One of the women is pregnant, so we're making ready in case the thaw triggers premature labor.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: That's all?

SHARP: That's my full report at this time, Alcar. (correcting herself) Captain. Is there anything else?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: No, that will do, Doctor. (pause) Dismissed.

(Sharp goes back the way she came. Dovan and Lorhrok resume walking.)

DOVAN: (sigh) Every time I start to like a girl, I blow up a planet and suddenly she doesn't want to be friends anymore.

LORHROK: You and Doctor Sharp, sir?

DOVAN: We would have had fun.

LORHROK: You should apologize to her.

DOVAN: I can't. I tricked her into helping me kill six or seven billion people on Gevinon. And I'd do it again if I had to. Ah, Commander Neeva, ready to beam me down?

NEEVA: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: You'd better head back up to the bridge, Number One.

LORHROK: Just be careful, sir.

DOVAN: No promises.

(Neeva and Dovan enter the transporter room.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR TRANSPORTER ROOM (FLASHBACK)

(Neeva takes the station; Dovan mounts the pad.)

NEEVA: You'll be beaming down into the Citadel of Ancient Might, the Zath center of government.

DOVAN: And you're sure about me beaming down alone? You may have noticed, my first officer is having a minor stroke about the regulations.

NEEVA: It bends the rules, I know – better than anyone. But the Zath follow the *nija* – their social law – religiously. They expect guests to do the same. To bring a guard would be to insult their hospitality.

DOVAN: I don't doubt their hospitality. I doubt the ability of an occupied people to resist a valuable hostage.

NEEVA: The *nija* guarantees an absolute right to stay with their leader for up to three days and three nights, under penalty of war.

DOVAN: And they'd never win a war against the *Excelsior*.

NEEVA: Exactly. Of course, if you stay any longer, you legally become his slave.

DOVAN: And then you'll send the guards?

NEEVA: Depends how much I like seeing Alecz in the big chair.

DOVAN: Oh, now, wa[it a minute there]

(Dovan is already being beamed out.)

NEEVA: Energizing!

SCENE 404-12**LOCATION: CITADEL OF ANCIENT MIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

(Dovan materializes.)

SECRETARY: Well well, there's something you don't see every day.

DOVAN: Um... what? Where is this? Am I on Zerquix?

SECRETARY: You appear out of thin air six inches in front of my desk and you don't know where you are?

DOVAN: I was supposed to materialize in the Central Crusade at the Citadel of Ancient Might.

SECRETARY: And welcome to it, young man. (she presses a physical button) Minister, your four o'clock is here to see you. (she releases the button) Take a seat over there, Captain Alcar Dovan, and the minister will be right with you when he becomes available.

(An office door opens, the minister emerges.)

MINISTER SHAWN: Zerquin's eyeteeth, Muriel, the man just saved the lives of eighteen Zath, and he's a foreign dignitary besides! Come in, Captain Dovan, come in!

SECRETARY: Minister's a bit fickle today, then?

(Dovan follows the minister into his inner office and the minister closes the door behind him.)

LOCATION: MINISTER'S OFFICE (FLASHBACK)

DOVAN: Thank you, ah...

MINISTER SHAWN: Lesser Minister Shaw'naw'rez'tik'can'lo'feen of the Zath Assembly, Captain?

DOVAN: Lesser Minister? Please, don't... take this the wrong way, Minister, but I was told I'd be speaking to [the leader of the Sons of Zerquin.]

MINISTER SHAWN: To the head of our government? Yes. Don't let the title fool you; I am the leader of the Zath government, and you will be dealing with me directly.

DOVAN: Oh, I'm — I'm very sorry. I'm Captain Alcar Dovan of the United Federation Starship *Excelsior*.

MINISTER SHAWN: So I hear!

DOVAN: It was just, your title... [...it made me think, maybe, you were just... well, a functionary]

MINISTER SHAWN: Something you'll learn about the Zath, Captain, is that we stand on symbolism. I'm sure you noticed that the "Central Crusade of the Citadel of Ancient Might" doesn't quite look the part. It's basically an office park and always has been, has to be, but the name tells you what it all stands for, beneath the looks. I'm called the "Lesser Minister" because my people want to remind me that I serve at their pleasure — they are the true ministers, while I am but their slave.

DOVAN: Does that... really work?

MINISTER SHAWN: Well, no, it's a pretense. When I go out for dinner, the people ask me for autographs, not the other way around. It's as close to a lie as you can get without actually

telling one. Just like everything else in politics. (pause) But it's like saying that you're "humbled" to accept the office after you just spent ten moons on the campaign trail screaming your head off about how great you'd be at the job and how terrible the other guy is: your "humility" is so transparently a lie that it comes back around the corner and says something true. It's a little public concession to the *nija*, to virtue — and politics is all about concessions.

DOVAN: I'm afraid I don't know much about politics, Minister Shaw'naw'...rez...tik?

MINISTER SHAWN: Please, call me Shawn. Bit of a mouthful otherwise. And have a seat, Captain — I'm sorry I talked your ear off, of course you don't know anything about politics, you know about starship captaining. And I understand you've found something I thought was gone forever.

DOVAN: The *Gralik Hann*.

MINISTER SHAWN: Yes, the *Gralik Hann*. Tea, Captain? Friendly warning: according to the *nija*, you have to accept it, or I can marry your third cousin or something.

DOVAN: Then I'd better accept. I wouldn't wish Cousin Aden on anyone.

MINISTER SHAWN: Is it really true what they're saying? Everyone on the *Gralik Hann* survived?

(He pours some tea into a cup, then another cup.)

DOVAN: Yes, Minister [Shawn, it's true.]

MINISTER SHAWN: Just Shawn. Please. Really, it's fine. Have they said anything about the attack?

DOVAN: The survivors are all still unconscious, Shawn. Some kind of suspended animation; it's taking a while to thaw them out.

MINISTER SHAWN: I must admit, I'm pleasantly surprised to hear the freezers kept working. The Norkovan capitalists who sell them to us know we can't buy from anyone else, so they rig them to fail every once in a while.

DOVAN: Rig them?

MINISTER SHAWN: The Norkovans want the Zath dead, Captain. They know we'll never stop fighting for our world until they've killed us all. Why else would they launch an unprovoked attack on an unarmed civilian transport in interplanetary space?

DOVAN: Are you saying the *Gralik Hann* was attacked? The Norkovan government [said that the ship was bombed from the inside.]

MINISTER SHAWN: Yes, yes, the Norkovan government. They probably told you the story about the bomb and the baffle plating, didn't they?

DOVAN: So you officially deny that your government planted the bomb.

MINISTER SHAWN: Captain, there was no bomb. Nine months ago, at zero-three-zero-ninety-two, the Norkovan combat frigate *Kyana* transmitted a single warning message to the *Gralik Hann* – which, obviously, no one could hear, because the passengers were frozen. Eight seconds later, the *Kyana* opened fire. Four-point-four seconds after that, the *Gralik Hann* was spinning away into deep interplanetary space, and the Norkova were left deciding for several hours whether to risk a seek and destroy mission, or let the *Gralik Hann* die on its own.

DOVAN: The Norkova told a very different story.

MINISTER SHAWN: Oh, yes? And did they show you the sensor logs?

DOVAN: There are logs?

MINISTER SHAWN: There were! But not anymore. The Norkovan military says they were "lost". What a sad coincidence for the families of the victims.

DOVAN: What about your own sensor logs?

MINISTER SHAWN: Oh, we're not allowed to have those, Captain. The Norkovans say that satellites are "military technology," you see. So whenever we try to put up so much as a weather satellite, Speaker Tsur calls it a war of aggression and carpet-bombs a few of our cities.

DOVAN: But they let you build ships?

MINISTER SHAWN: Certainly not! Because that could only be a prelude to invasion, couldn't it? Surely the Zath couldn't just be visiting their families back home on Zathana! Suspended animation must have a military purpose; it can't be because full life support is too expensive! (pause) I'm sorry, captain. We've been losing this war for my entire adult life. The dead are countless, our supplies controlled by the black market. When it comes to the Norvokans, my temper...

DOVAN: Perfectly understandable, uh, Shawn.

MINISTER SHAWN: Thanks. I'll try to keep a lid on it. So, when will the *Excelsior* be able to repatriate our citizens? The end of the day, you said?

DOVAN: They'll be thawed by the end of the day. But repatriation is another question. You claim the Norkova attacked the *Gralik Hann*. But the Norkova claim you did. We have to investigate. Days, maybe weeks, before we can render a decision. You'll be invited to send representatives to a summit aboard my ship; that's where discussions will begin. We guarantee safe passage to both sides.

(Pause.)

MINISTER SHAWN: Weeks?

DOVAN: We have to be careful.

(Pause.)

MINISTER SHAWN: Of course. Of course, you're right. You don't know us, you don't know this war. You're trying to protect my people as best you can, and the *nija* honors you for that. I will ask their families to be patient for a little while longer.

DOVAN: I'm sorry, Shawn. We'll have them home as soon as we can.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-14**LOCATION: JEFFERIES TUBE**

ADOW: Freezing in here.

J'NAYA: No life support. This part of the ship's losing heat fast.

ADOW: I know. That means this part of the ship was close to the explosion. What if it means number three fusion core is gone, too?

J'NAYA: We already checked one and two, and they're scrap. We can't afford to lose three.

ADOW: But what if we did?

(J'naya brakes herself, then opens the hatch.)

LOCATION: AUXILIARY FUSION CORE 3

(J'naya and Adow drift out from the Jefferies Tube.)

J'NAYA: Thank God. This one looks half-usable.

ADOW: Yeah, now quit gawking; we need to get it back online.

(Kestra pushes off and floats over to the disabled generator, but slams into the metal core with a loud bang.)

J'NAYA: Ow!

ADOW: You alright?

J'NAYA: Just clumsy. Beginning the startup sequence. (She pulls a manual lever and presses a couple computer buttons) Help me find the severed interlinks. We need to get power into Sections Forty-Six through Forty-Eight to restore life support, or we'll freeze in a few minutes. After that, structural integrity.

ADOW: No, those are not our top priorities right now. Thrusters are.

J'NAYA: I really don't want to freeze, Kinash.

ADOW: Look. The gyroscope.

J'NAYA: What about it?

ADOW: Look how it's spinning.

J'NAYA: It's probably broken. The explosion...

ADOW: No. That tilt just means we're not in absolute zero-gee anymore.

J'NAYA: How could that be possible?

ADOW: If we're caught in Zathana's gravity well.

J'NAYA: ...which would mean we're spiraling toward the planet with no engines, no deflectors, and no heat shields.

ADOW: Uh-huh.

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: Remind me what sections the thrusters are housed in.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-14**LOCATION: LORHROK'S QUARTERS (FLASHBACK)**

(Neeva and Lorhrok are eating dinner together.)

LORHROK: Pass the salt?

NEEVA: Here.

LORHROK: Thanks. Glad you could slip away for a little breakfast before the delegates arrive.

NEEVA: So? How was your first stint in the diplomatic corps?

LORHROK: The captain was right: I'm not half-bad at this. Glad I've been studying the first contact protocols, though. From what the Norkovans tell me, it's not going to be easy negotiating with xenophobic maniacs like the Zath.

NEEVA: (with a rueful chuckle) Ha. Of course that's their line.

LORHROK: Is it wrong?

NEEVA: Did the Norkovans tell you anything about *nija*?

LORHROK: Sure. The Zath etiquette guide.

NEEVA: It's a lot more than that. Think Emily Post plus Confucius rolled into the Qu'ran.

LORHROK: I only understood the first none of that.

NEEVA: Then try the social power of the Ferengi Rules of Acquisition with the outlook of the Syrrannite Manifesto and the authority of the Bajoran Prophecies. The *nija* tells each person who he was and what God expects of him, and the Zath built their way of life on it. It can be harsh to violators, but never barbaric, and, for centuries, it ensured a harmonious, modernizing society. (pause) Then, one day, the Norkova “crashed”. Suddenly there are millions of immigrants – immigrants who don’t know *nija*, don’t respect it, and don’t enforce it. They started seizing land.

LORHROK: The Norkova didn’t have much choice.

NEEVA: There were ways to negotiate hospitality within *nija*; the Norkovans ignored them. Communities fell apart. Zath families were driven to penury. The only surprising thing is war didn’t break out sooner. By the time the bells stopped, the Zath had lost their society, their world, friends and family . . . all because some aliens refused to follow the unwritten laws of their society. (pause) I don’t know about you, but I’d be a little suspicious of aliens, too.

LORHROK: But, wait, doesn’t that get things a little backwards? Couldn’t the Zath have made an effort to actually reach out to the Norkova? Offer them refuge and friendship, teach them about the *nija*. If the Zath had been willing, really willing, to open themselves up to their new neighbors – to compromise, instead of isolating them – the war never would have happened. *Nija* would still rule the planet today, because true friends would never ignore it.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Ohhh, no you don’t, buster.

LORHROK: What?

NEEVA: This is one of those metaphors of yours. At dinner, you were saying how I needed to open up to you more. So now I’m supposedly acting like the Zath?

(Lorhrok stands up and starts walking over to Neeva.)

LORHROK: Alright, you got me. I guess I need to be a little less meta. (pause) If it helps, I don't think you're a xenophobic maniac.

NEEVA: Well, that's something, at least.

LORHROK: I don't spend my free time with people who hate. And I certainly don't sneak up and kiss them on the back of the neck. (he lightly kisses the back of her neck.)

NEEVA: Okay, that will make up for it. If you promise to recycle the dishes, too.

LORHROK: You're on.

(Flashback sound.)

SCENE 404-15**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR**

(Neeva and the Major are moving through the corridor.)

NEEVA: C'mon, Major. Fusion One is right around this corner.

MAJOR: Ma'am! DOWN! (He tackles Neeva.)

(Gunfire! Three commandos open up with rapid, overlapping, semiautomatic weapons! All bullets strike the wall.)

NEEVA: I'm alright! I count three commandos!

MAJOR: We're completely exposed, ma'am!

YUBARI: *Hey, uglies! Behind you!*

(She opens fire.)

NEEVA: Asuka!

MAJOR: She has them flanked! Fire!

(Neeva and the Major open up with their phasers.)

COMMANDO 404-1, COMMANDO 404-2, AND COMMANDO 404-3: Agg! Ack! Ahhh! Eeeee!

(Yubari runs up, panting a little.)

YUBARI: Either of you get shot?

NEEVA: I'm fine. Major?

MAJOR: Ready and able, ma'am.

NEEVA: We have to get to Fusion One. Can you escort us?

YUBARI: Commander, Fusion One's gone.

NEEVA: What?

YUBRAI: That's what J'naya told me. I'm fine too, by the way.

NEEVA: You saw Kestra? In person? And she was going to get the fusion generators back online?

YUBARI: She and Adow came through here right after I dropped off the captain in sickbay. They were bickering.

NEEVA: (exhales) Thank the ancestors. Now let's get a look at who we're fighting.

(The Major steps over to the commandos.)

MAJOR: Ma'am, these commandos are Zath.

NEEVA: All of them?

MAJOR: Yes, ma'am.

NEEVA: *Ghuy'cha'*! Why would they do this? What are they looking for?

YUBARI: Actually, Commander, I followed these three for a few minutes. I overheard them talking. (pause) Neeva, I think they're here to kill the *Gralik Hann* survivors.

MAJOR: All of them?

YUBARI: Men, women, and children.

NEEVA: They blew a hole in a *Sovereign*-class starship just to make sure that two dozen of their "collaborator" countrymen are executed for crimes they didn't commit?

YUBARI: I'm sorry, Neeva.

MAJOR: Ma'am, the survivors are in Cargo Bay Two.

YUBARI: And if the Zath get to the children before we do, so help me...

(She charges her gun)

NEEVA: Belay that, Lieutenant! We don't do vengeance. I suspect that's how all this got started in the first [place.]

(The whole ship shakes! The hull groans! Everyone is thrown to the ground!)

YUBARI: What was that?

NEEVA: Gravity. Air pressure. You name it. This ship is a few minutes from being torn apart. Come on!

SCENE 404-16**LOCATION: MCKINLEY COCKPIT**

LORHROK: *Computer, power up Captain's Yacht McKinley.*

(The computer boops and the small craft powers up. Gravity is restored, and Lorhrok steps gracefully to the ground.)

COMPUTER: *Sensors. Communications. Propulsion. Online.*

LORHROK: *I'm just glad to have gravity again. Computer, status report on surrounding space.*

COMPUTER: *Several Excelsior auxiliary craft from Renegade fighter squadron are active and engaged in defensive space combat.*

LORHROK: *The Renegades are in combat? Against whom?*

COMPUTER: *Small fighters, unknown configuration.*

LORHROK: *That could be Zath or Norkova. Computer, patch me through to the fighter squadron.*

ROL: *Vesant, take your wing and see if those party crashers can pay the cover charge.*

VESANT: *Roger roger! All lanes tighten on me!*

ROL: *I've had just about enough of this. Sylveste, you want to drop down and see if you can talk 'em into a ceasefire?*

SYLVESTE: *Are we talking standard diplomacy or shotgun diplomacy?*

ROL: *Take your pick, Ambassador.*

SYLVESTE: *Ambassador? Let me go see how fast I can get myself expelled.*

LORHROK: *I thought I was the ship's ambassador today, Bev.*

ROL: *Alecz! Sir! I'm glad you made it safe to the McKinley.*

LORHROK: *Likewise, Bevoney. Who's attacking you?*

ROL: *Zath, captain. Thirty seconds after the bomb went off, my pilots say, the whole Zath air force came screaming in at us.*

LORHROK: *So much for "we can't build ships because sanctions."*

ROL: *We're outnumbered ten to one. But my Renegades haven't taken a casualty, and we haven't let a single shot through.*

LORHROK: *Good. If these damage reports are right, a single shot could be the end of the Excelsior. I thought the Norkovans enforced a military control zone around Zerquix.*

ROL: *They do, but the Zath seized remote control of one of the orbital weapon stations and turned it on the Nork navy. They have their hands full; for now, it's just us and the Zath.*

LORHROK: *Do you need anything from me?*

ROL: *The McKinley's too lightly shielded to fight. But we are going to need an engineer – and pretty soon.*

LORHROK: That weapons station. You want me to take back remote control?

ROL: *I'm hoping you're still as good an engineer as you were before the ambassadorship, Alecz.*

LORHROK: I can do it, but, if I'm gonna do it fast, I'll have to get pretty close to the station.

ROL: *How close?*

LORHROK: Tight-band tetryon range. About six meters.

ROL: *(groans) So much for keeping you out of the fight.*

LORHROK: You need that weapons station on our side, or the Zath will blow up the *Excelsior*. That makes it my top priority. Give me ninety seconds to contact department heads.

ROL: *Aye, sir. Please hurry; my kids are getting tired out here. Like you said, one mistake...*

LORHROK: And we're atoms and microwaves. I know, Ensign. Lorhrok out.

SCENE 404-17**LOCATION: AUXILIARY FUSION CORE 3**

J'NAYA: Annnnd... now.

ADOW: Powering on.

(Adow presses a computer button.)

(The core starts to hum.)

J'NAYA: We are LIVE!

ADOW: We're only getting five percent power. It's not enough.

J'NAYA: Not enough for life support, but more than enough for dorsal thrusters. Get them up. Can we assert navigation control from here?

ADOW: Transferring power. Sure, probably, through the BIOS, but [it won't be real pretty. No GUI.]

J'NAYA: Wait! Don't do that!

ADOW: What? It's just a power transfer.

J'NAYA: And it's freezing cold in here. If you try to push all that power through cold isolinear circuits at once, they'll short out. And then we really are dead.

(Pause.)

ADOW: But if I slow down, it'll take ten minutes to turn on thrusters! Maybe fifteen!

J'NAYA: More than enough time.

ADOW: The ship's falling into the atmosphere!

J'NAYA: More than enough time.

ADOW: If we're lucky.

J'NAYA: Yes. If we're lucky.

SCENE 404-18**LOCATION: CORRIDOR**

YUBARI: This is it. Cargo Bay 2.

NEEVA: Phew! I forgot how tiring zero-gee movement could be. Let's bust that door down, Asuka.

(The Major is already running a tricorder scan.)

MAJOR: No, wait! Scans show weapon signatures inside.

YUBARI: The commandos got here first.

MAJOR: Yes, ma'am.

NEEVA: I don't hear any weapons fire in there. Which means they're either getting ready for the mass execution... or they've already done it. Major, do you know how to pick up the audio spectrum on that tricorder?

MAJOR: I'm not sure, ma'am.

NEEVA: Here, give it to me. (Neeva fiddles around) There you are.

ZATH COMMANDO #2: There's a power conduit behind that bulkhead on your left. Move the freezers over there, and their deaths will serve a higher purpose. If they could not live in the nija, at least we will give them a chance to die in it!

MAJOR: The survivors are still alive.

YUBARI: Not for long. We can't wait for our reinforcements.

NEEVA: I know. Set your phasers to wide-beam heavy stun. (All three of them adjust their phaser power settings) On four, we open that door and spray the entire cargo bay. Take those Zath down. Asuka, you have the manual override?

(Yubari shatters a small glass pane. A little servo whirs and the override activates.)

YUBARI: I do now.

NEEVA: One. (pause) Two. (pause) Three! (pause) FOUR!

(Yubari pulls the lever and the cargo bay door slides open.)

NEEVA: FIRE!

(A number of wide-beam phasers sweep the room! Zath commandoes try to return fire (semiautomatic gunfire), but can only get a couple shots off before going down.)

COMMANDO 404-1, COMMANDO 404-2, AND COMMANDO 404-3: Oh! Uhh! Ugh!!

NEEVA: Cease fire!

(They cease firing. Neeva immediately begins climbing a ladder.)

NEEVA: Asuka, secure the room! I want the Zath against the wall and their sidearms at my feet!

YUBARI: Commander, they're all floating! How do I get them to stay put?

NEEVA: There are plenty of attach points along the wall, like this ladder! Use your imagination!

YUBARI: Yes, sir. Let's start with you, my friend.

(She unzips his vest, finds his gun, and deactivates it)

NEEVA: Major, check the freezer seals! The commandos might have injured the survivors! I'm getting the (uhn) medkit.

(Yubari is unzipping another soldier's vest.)

MAJOR: Ma'am, yes, ma'am!

YUBARI: Oh, hell. (pause) Neeva? You're gonna wanna come see this!

(Neeva pushes off the wall.)

NEEVA: Major! Medkit! Catch!

MAJOR: I've got it, ma'am!

NEEVA: What is it, Lieutenant?

YUBARI: Look. Underneath his combat armor.

(We hear the some mechanical and electoric clicks and whirs and beeps, faintly.)

NEEVA: It's a suicide vest, isn't it? He's wearing a bomb. Major!

(Neeva pulls out her tricorder, but Yubari stops her from activating it with a hand.)

YUBARI: Don't try to scan it. That might set it off. Major, do you have any experience with bomb disposal?

MAJOR: Ma'am, I know enough to recognize that this part here? Is a timer. We only have a couple of minutes. Not enough time for me. Maybe an expert.

NEEVA: We don't have an expert. (pause) Alright, start evacuating the room. Both of you. Save as many as you can.

MAJOR: Ma'am, I need to check for other bombs first.

NEEVA: Fine. Just be quick.

YUBARI: What about you?

NEEVA: We can't get all these stasis pods out in time — not even in zero gee. We need to stop this bomb, and there's only one person who can do that.

YUBARI: Who?

NEEVA: The bomber. I'm reviving him.

(She opens the medkit.)

(Yubari and the Major walk away.)

YUBARI: Hang on, Major. I want you to start securing the stasis pods. Tie them down to anything you can – anything fixed to the hull.

MAJOR: Commander Neeva told us to evacuate the survivors, ma'am.

YUBARI: Neeva told us to save as many as we can. This is how we're doing it. (pause) This is a security matter, Major. I give the orders.

MAJOR: Yes, ma'am. I'll still need your help, ma'am.

(Yubari begins to move away from the Major.)

YUBARI: In a minute, Major. I have to see if I can squeeze five seconds of residual power out of the cargo bay manifolds.

MAJOR: How?

YUBARI: Like running any dead battery, Major: you give it as much time as you can, then you switch it on and cross your fingers. I'll give Neeva a chance, but then... wait for my signal.

SCENE 404-20**LOCATION: MCKINLEY COCKPIT**

(The *McKinley* is now in the midst of the battle. Federation fighters are firing phasers; the Zath fighters are firing futuristic machine guns.)

ROL: *Now! Fire! Take out his engines!*

(Lorhrok hits the buttons and fires.)

LORHROK: Thirty percent damage. Zath fighter still has his forward gun turret.

ROL: *What? You had a clean shot!*

LORHROK: It's the captain's yacht. The weapons aren't much better than the shields.

ROL: *Well, we're almost to the weapons platform.*

LORHROK: I have to get within six meters and stay there.

ROL: *I know. We'll divert more fighters to cover you once you're sitting still.*

LORHROK: No! That would leave the *Excelsior* too exposed!

ROL: *Aye, sir. I'll do my – Alecz! Your six!*

(A spray of bullets punches through the hull and pings into the console right next to Lorhrok, exploding and sparking it. The computer instantly activates forcefields to seal the hull breaches.)

LORHROK: Spast! Barrel rolling!

ROL: *That spun him right into me. Annnnd... (He fires. Explosion.) I got 'im!*

LORHROK: I'm in range of the tower. Cutting engines and beginning the hack. Please keep me alive, Ensign.

(Lorhrok cuts the engines and begins remote computer hack.)

ROL: *That's my whole job description, Acting Captain.*

SCENE 404-21**LOCATION: CARGO BAY 2**

(The bomb timer continues to beep.)

(Neeva pulls out a hypospray, presses a couple hypospray buttons, and injects it into the commando.)

NEEVA: Wake up. (pause) Wake up. I know you can hear me.

SUICIDE BOMBER: You've taken me prisoner. I'll kill you for that.

NEEVA: In a couple minutes, you'll kill us both with that bomb strapped to your chest.

BOMBER: You know about the bomb? And you haven't turned it off?

NEEVA: We don't know how.

BOMBER: We feared your ship was too mighty for us. Yet look how swiftly the *nija* has brought you low.

NEEVA: I want you to turn the bomb off.

BOMBER: If you hadn't tied my hands, I would have already detonated it.

NEEVA: You don't have to commit mass murder. You can choose life. Yours and theirs.

BOMBER: Theirs? The collaborators'?

NEEVA: These people didn't collaborate. They aren't even accused of it.

BOMBER: But their families did! Their families reached out to the Norkova who have oppressed us and murdered us for generations! Where do you think that comes from? How do you think traitors breed? As long as the blood of collaborators flows through our veins, we will never reclaim the homeworld!

NEEVA: You'll never reclaim the homeworld anyway.

BOMBER: If you believe that, you have never seen the fighting spirit we all share – the spirit born of obedience to *nija*.

NEEVA: No, I guess I haven't. But I have seen the Norkovan orbital defense grid. I've seen their air force. I've seen their I.P.B.M. silos. (pause) Fighting a war you've already lost isn't *nija*. It's only murder.

BOMBER: You'd have us surrender our freedoms to an unjust conquerer, like the collaborators on Zathana did? Ratify Tsur's butchery in the name of self-preservation?

NEEVA: If it meant my family wouldn't be bombed, yes I'd do that and more. This isn't justice you're fighting for! And it certainly isn't safety! You're doing this out of pride!

BOMBER: We have everything to be proud of. Before the Norkova stole our world, the culture of *nija* flourished across twelve continents. We mastered art, spread literature, tamed law.

NEEVA: That may have been true, once. But what about now? The *nija* was your skeleton, but now the bones are all you have left. They keep you isolated and afraid - they're your prison.

BOMBER: No, the *Norkova* built our prison and left us to die there, on Zerquix. Only they see us thriving, even on our desolate paradise, and they are jealous, so they bomb us.

NEEVA: So you bomb them back. And they bomb you back. It doesn't have to be like this. Turn off your bomb.

BOMBER: You haven't given me a single reason to do that.

NEEVA: Then forget the politics. How about a simple one? Don't you have family? Someone who'll miss you?

BOMBER: I have a son.

NEEVA: A son, congratulations! How old is he?

BOMBER: His name is Acost. He's almost three.

NEEVA: And what is Acost doing right now, at this moment?

BOMBER: He can't wait to see me again.

NEEVA: He's not going to, if you go through with this.

BOMBER: My son is dead, Federation. The *Norkova* murdered him with one of their bombs eleven months ago.

(Pause.)

NEEVA: Why?

BOMBER: I don't know. They don't attach memos of explanation to their missiles. They just leave you with a tiny, broken body and let you figure it out. (pause) I can't wait to see him, either.

NEEVA: Norkovans have children, too. Even collaborators do. There are a few children that age right here in the room with us.

BOMBER: But there's a difference between them and my Acost.

NEEVA: What?

BOMBER: They deserve it.

(Wristwatch timer runs out.)

BOMBER: Time's up. No one can stop the bomb now. I hope there's someone you want to see up there too, Federation.

NEEVA: Please, [there's still a little time to stop this.]

YUBARI: *That's it! NOW, MAJOR!*

COMPUTER: (in background) *Decompression Alert. Clear the deck. Shuttle inbound. Decompression Alert. Clear the deck.*

MAJOR: *Commander, hang on to something!*

(The cargo bay doors begin to open!)

NEEVA: What?!

MAJOR: *We're opening the cargo bay doors!*

NEEVA: WHAT?!

(ALL the air RUSHES out of the entire compartment, sweeping away anything and everything that isn't tied down.)

BOMBER: Ah! No, wait! WAIT! WAAIIIIIIIIIT!

(He is swept into space.)

YUBARI: *Closing cargo bay doors!*

(The doors close and the decompression gradually stops as they slide shut. Everyone gulps in air.)

(the bomber's bomb explodes, not far outside the cargo bay doors. The ship is rocked, the cargo bay especially so.)

MAJOR: Bomb has detonated! The hull is holding!

NEEVA: Why...

(Yubari pushes off a wall and approaches Neeva.)

YUBARI: Neeva, are you alright?

NEEVA: You opened up the big doors to space and just sucked him away? What about the collaborators?

YUBARI: We tied down all their stasis pods in time. Everyone's fine.

NEEVA: Next time, maybe you could warn me before you blow anybody into space.

YUBARI: If we'd told you, you'd have told us to save our own skins and get out of here.

MAJOR: Ma'am, we wanted to save everyone, but we thought you'd consider our plan too risky.

NEEVA: And you were right. That was insubordination in the second degree; maybe the first if the court-martial board likes me. You're both on report.

MAJOR: Yes, ma'am.

YUBARI: Seriously? We saved your life?

NEEVA: And... I'm buying you dinner. Both of you. Anything you want, maximum replicator resolution, on me.

YUBARI: Now that's more like it.

(The ship trembles again. All are knocked to the floor / walls, again.)

NEEVA: Assuming the ship doesn't blow up in the next couple minutes, anyway.

SCENE 404-22**LOCATION: MCKINLEY COCKPIT**

(Battle continuing around McKinley. McKinley is firing weird-sounding pulses at the nearby weapons station at irregular but short intervals.)

ROL: *Alecz, I'm not sure I can hold them! There's four on my tail!*

LORHROK: I'm going as fast as I can. Every second I spend here, saving the *Excelsior* from fighters, is a second I won't be able to spend saving the *Excelsior* from burning up in the atmosphere. I'm fully motivated; I just... can't... find... the frequency...

ROL: *I know you're doing your best, but, sir – I really can't hold them! Just blew an engine... I'm losing attitude control! (pause) I'm surrounded!*

(The tetryon beam suddenly takes on a slight melodic quality, and the computer goes crazy.)

LORHROK: There! I got it!

(The weapons station swivels and starts firing really big energy pulses.)

ROL: *The Zath are running! They can't stand up to this kind of firepower!*

LORHROK: Bev, call your men back to defensive patrol! How's the *Excels...* Oh, hell. (pause) Lorhrok to J'naya, come in! You're starting to lose hull plating! There's no time left! You've got to power the thrusters now! (pause) J'naya, come in!

SCENE 404-23**LOCATION: AUXILIARY FUSION CORE 3**

(The whole ship is constantly shaking.)

ADOW: Boss, we're well into the upper atmosphere!

J'NAYA: At least we don't have to worry about freezing anymore! Still waiting on thrusters.

ADOW: A few more seconds and we won't have thrusters anymore!

J'NAYA: I've only got them powered to sixty percent of minimum!

ADOW: Look, the circuits are warming up. They can handle the power surge. I know they can!

J'NAYA: That's not what the specs say!

ADOW: You've got to risk it. (pause) Trust me, sir.

(Pause.)

J'NAYA: Alright. Going to full power... now.

(The fusion generator starts outputting full power, a bunch of circuits light up, and there's a small sparking/explosion as one of the circuits shorts out.)

J'NAYA: We lost lateral junction X-L-5!

ADOW: We've got bandwidth to spare! Keep going!

(Another explosion/short circuit.)

J'NAYA: And Zed-Zed-Nine!

ADOW: We made the red line! Thruster power available!

J'NAYA: Activate them! Take us up! Get us out of danger!

SCENE 404-24**LOCATION: SPACE**

DOVAN: *Captain's Log, supplemental. The Excelsior has been under repair in Norkovan orbit for the past two days. Note commendation for First Officer Alecz Lorhrok, whose first command went a helluva lot better than mine did.*

LOCATION: READY ROOM

MINISTER SHAWN: *In short, Captain, the Zath government wishes to express its deep regrets that your ship became a battlefield. We didn't want it, and, of course, you didn't want it. We apologize for the harm done.*

DOVAN: Apologize?! Minister Shawn, you bombed my ship, attacked my passengers, and killed my crew during a diplomatic conference. And now you say you regret it? Who made you do it?

MINISTER SHAWN: *One of our great writers teaches that war is the tyranny of circumstance.*

DOVAN: I'll be sure to tell the families that their sisters and sons were victims of circumstance, not Zath bullets. (rueful chuckle) You say you're in a war, but I don't see one. All I've seen is the Zath killing Norkovans and anyone else who gets in the way.

MINISTER SHAWN: *You think you have any idea how this conflict works because you've been here for two days? Because you saw part of a single battle?*

DOVAN: I lost thirty people, most of them diplomatic guests on a mission of peace.

MINISTER SHAWN: *The Norkovans killed over a thousand, most of them civilians just living in peace!*

DOVAN: Not in this battle, Shawn.

MINISTER SHAWN: *Really? Sixteen hours ago, a Norkovan air squadron swept aside our piteous defenses and carpet-bombed our capital city, Murai. They said they were attacking the airfields, but if that's so I don't understand why our doctors are fishing dead kids out of bombed-out schools and hospitals.*

DOVAN: Our sensors would have seen that.

MINISTER SHAWN: *Do you want me to send you the pictures, captain? Your sensors were down for repairs last night for seven hours. Following a repair schedule the Norkova helped draw up. Correct?*

(Pause.)

DOVAN: That's correct.

MINISTER SHAWN: *And one of the collaborators whose life you saved used to work as the air marshall for Murai. (pause) You saw exactly what the Norkova wanted you to see, and no more.*

DOVAN: You could have told us all this at the summit.

MINISTER SHAWN: *We couldn't take the risk. Too many lives were at stake. And now those kids are dead, because I blew it. What you saw and judged us on was nothing more than a leviathan's fin. (pause) I'm sending you those pictures anyway, Captain. On your course,*

you're bound to meet with the Perenalthorias Council eventually. I want you to show these to them.

DOVAN: You want me to do you a favor? Why in Kobol's name would I?

MINISTER SHAWN: *Because you care about doing the right thing more than you care about hating me, Captain. Zerquix, Out.*

(The comm closes.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: (exhales slowly) (pause) Alright. Computer, take my other caller off hold.

(The computers beeps in an affirmative. New transmission begins.)

PARKER: *Captain Dovan, I don't like to be kept waiting.*

DOVAN: Admiral Parker, I never visit the holodecks on Tuesday.

PARKER: *What?*

DOVAN: Oh, I'm sorry; I thought we were sharing random facts about ourselves. What small errand can my mighty starship run for you today, sir?

PARKER: *I don't appreciate your tone.*

DOVAN: And I don't appreciate being kept in the dark about a threat to my ship and crew.

PARKER: *What are you talking about, Captain?*

DOVAN: Neeva's been analyzing the Iconian ruin in this star system. Someone else searched the ruin, recently, just like all the others. But Neeva finally made the breakthrough this morning. (pause) We know, Admiral. We know who has been digging up Iconian graves all over the quadrant.

PARKER: *And you are not to discuss it on an open channel. Not this time.*

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

(Pause.)

PARKER: *Yes, we are.*

DOVAN: And do we know what that is?

PARKER: *I answered one question, Captain. Now, business.*

DOVAN: I assume you're about to tell me where to look next.

PARKER: *Were you able to get the coordinates of the original Norkova homeworld?*

DOVAN: Speaker Tsur was very helpful, yes. I'm sending the coordinates now. [SFX: some computer boops as he transmits the coordinates] But, Admiral, that planet exploded twenty years ago.

PARKER: *Planets don't just explode, Mister Dovan. Especially not twenty years ago. No new order: continue on your present course. Parker out.*

SCENE 404-25**LOCATION: CORRIDOR**

(Neeva rings the door chime.)

NEEVA: Hello? I brought *toca* chips.

(The door swishes open.)

ROL: Commander Neeva, welcome. I'm so happy you could come.

NEEVA: Alecz said I couldn't miss it. What are we playing tonight? Some human game?

ROL: My favorite. It's called *Diplomacy*, and you'll be playing as an ancient nation-state called France.

LORHROK: *Assuming we ever figure out the rules!*

ROL: Just wait until Yubari gets here and I'll teach you all at once, okay?

SHARP: *Oooh, are those toca chips?*

ROL: Let me get a bowl for them, Melissa.

(Rol walks away. Melissa Sharp stands and follows.)

SHARP: I'm not letting those out of my sight.

(Neeva walks up to Alecz and sits down.)

NEEVA: Hey, Alecz.

LORHROK: Hey, Neeva. Wait, what's wrong?

NEEVA: Look. (exhale) I haven't spoken to my mother in years, and that's still too recent. In five years, I see myself as first officer on one of the minor central starbases – thirty-four, two-one-six, Leviathan – you know, and, to be honest, I don't see you there with me – not yet, anyway. I'm sure that I never, ever want to have kids... but I have the feeling that, when I get older, I might not be as sure as I think. (pause) Anything else?

(Pause.)

LORHROK: Yeah. Gimme a kiss.

(They kiss.)

LORHROK: Now let's play *Diplomacy*. We can talk on our next picnic?

NEEVA: Next picnic?

LORHROK: You did like the first one, right?

NEEVA: Loved it.

LORHROK: Then I have a lot more of this starship to show you. There's a next.

NEEVA: I'll be there.

LORHROK: And, Neeva... I know what that meant to you. Thank you.

(Door opens, Yubari enters.)

YUBARI: I was told there would be world conquest. I don't see any world conquest.

(Rol walks back from the chips.)

ROL: Come in, Lieutenant, have a seat! World conquest is next. How about something to drink first?

END CREDITS

SCENE 404-26 (EPILOGUE)**LOCATION: PARKER'S OFFICE ON UNION**

(Windows open, some birds, very nice.)

PARKER: Commander Masterson.

MASTERSON: Sir?

PARKER: Put through my next caller.

MASTERSON: Aye, sir. Piping him through on a secure channel.

(The comm opens.)

PARKER: My apologies, Commander. I didn't mean to leave you waiting quite so long, but... well, you know what Captain Dovan is like.

UNDERWOOD: *Indeed I do, Admiral. What can I do for you, sir?*

PARKER: Mister Underwood, I'm sending you a set of coordinates I just received. I'd like you to divert the *Voltaire* to that location and investigate.

UNDERWOOD: *Shouldn't you be giving these orders to the captain?*

PARKER: I'd prefer that Captain Kel's official logs reflect something a little more... spontaneous.

UNDERWOOD: *You want me to trick her. Again.*

PARKER: I'm certain you'll come up with something.

UNDERWOOD: *What if we run into the Zeero out there, before they're finished searching? Does she even know about the bluegills?*

PARKER: The coordinates are near a quasar, and I'm told Captain Kel has a special fondness for quasars, does she not? A good start to your cover story.

UNDERWOOD: *You're well-informed as usual, Admiral.*

PARKER: Then that will be all. Parker out.