

Starship Excelsior Transcript

"Turns of Events"

(Season 1, Episode 2)

-Opening Titles-

CORTEZ: Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Excelsior. Her ongoing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life, and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before.

SCENE 102-01**LOCATION: *Excelsior* Bridge**

(Condition green. It is obvious several minutes have passed. We enter in mid-conversation.)

ROL: *... Yes, all five have been transported to the brig.*

AMARA: Good work, Mr. Rol.

DOVAN: I second that, Lieutenant.

ROL: *Thank you, sirs. Now let's just hope half-Betazoids can read lizards.*

AMARA: We'll find out in a few minutes, won't we, Mr. Rol? Bridge out.

DOVAN: What's our position, navigator?

HELDER: We're out of weapons range, sir.

AMARA: No indication of pursuit.

HELDER: That's because we could fly circles around them with one nacelle. Sir.

DOVAN: Very well. Full stop. I want full repairs before we go back in there... next time, we aren't going to stop for tea and biscuits with the enemy, if you know what I mean.

(pause)

HELDER: So that's it? We just sit here and put on Band-Aids while the Valandrin do God-knows-what to the captain?

DOVAN: Who knows, Mr. Helder? Maybe the Valandrin decided to give our senior staff an all-expenses-paid trip to their tropical zone. The weapons fire afterwards was a mere courtesy detail.

Of *course* we're going in, Commander. We're just not taking a kilometer-long target with us. Dovan to Engineering!

ADOW: Adow here, sir!

NARRATOR: Dovan groaned inwardly, remembering something Captain Amasov had taught him: Never, ever, *ever*, for any reason, *ever* let your Chief Engineer leave the ship. Ever.

DOVAN: Crewman Adow, do you have all the technical data we've gathered on Valandrian sensors?

ADOW: Yes, sir.

DOVAN: Good. They're not the most advanced race in the galaxy, from what I've gathered.

ADOW: No, sir.

DOVAN: Perfect. I need the *Muztag* outfitted with an anti-Valandrian stealth flight mode and ready to launch in forty-seven minutes. Pull any resources you have to, from any department.

And check with Arden P'chk'ro'ta in Sciences; he might be of some help to you.

ADOW: Commander, I—

DOVAN: I know you can do this, Crewman. Neither I nor the Captain would have assigned you to command the shift if we didn't have every confidence in your abilities.

NARRATOR: What he was actually thinking was, "My God, what have I done?", but there was no reason to inform Crewman Adow of that particular stray thought.

ADOW: (tepidly) We'll get it done, sir.

DOVAN: That's what I want to hear, Crewman. Dovan out.

Mr. Amara, have a security team in shuttlebay one in forty-seven minutes. In fact... this ship has marines, doesn't it? Have Hastings and a detachment of his people meet you there, too.

AMARA: Aye, sir. And, in the meantime...?

DOVAN: In the meantime, it's time to have a chat with our prisoners. You wanna be the good cop?

SCENE 102-02**LOCATION: Valandria — Just Outside the Oracle Cave.**

(Captain Cortez walks outside and sits down on a rock)

CORTEZ: (exhales tiredly)

(Lorhrok and Hunter follow her out.)

LORHROK: Captain?

CORTEZ: I just needed a minute to think, Lieutenant.

LORHROK: Well, it looks like a Starfleet hologram to me, sir. Doesn't that mean we just remove it and try to figure out what happened?

HUNTER: Lieutenant, it's a great deal more complicated than that. We're talking about a — I'm sorry, Captain.

CORTEZ: Don't be, Ensign. Please, go on. Maybe if you say it aloud I'll be able to make more sense of it.

HUNTER: Lieutenant, we're talking about a *massive* violation of the Prime Directive no matter what course of action we take. This machine has been here for — what did she say? Nearly half a millenium? — and has evidently become central to Valandrian religion *and* science.

LORHROK: The Directive orders us to clean up any cultural contamination. Which means removing the hologram.

HUNTER: Does it? What would have happened on your native Trill four hundred years ago if an alien race had come out of the sky and summarily removed your Captain Ronec Vex *and* the Great Prophet Zarquon in the middle of their careers? Would that

have *removed* their influence... or altered and amplified it in ways we can't begin to predict?

(thoughtful pause)

CORTEZ: You see, Lieutenant, societies can't be modified as easily as a computer program. You'll have to think a little differently than you're used to out here on the frontier.

LORHROK: I'll do my best, ma'am.

CORTEZ: Of course you will, Lieutenant.

(She stands up.)

CORTEZ: I'm going to have a talk with the Oracle. Wait here.

LOCATION: Oracle Cave

(She heads back into the mouth of the cave, stopping beside Hastings. We hear Betra-Na speaking to the Oracle in the background)

ORACLE: ...would seem to be in your best interest. Beyond that, I have no further information.

BETRA-NA: This is not what you told us before.

CORTEZ: (sotto) Captain Hastings, I want you to take your marines and investigate this cave a little more. Spread out. If this *is* a Federation vessel from the future, we may be able to find some things in here the Valandrin don't know about.

HASTINGS: Aye, captain.

(Cortez approaches the Oracle and Premier.)

ORACLE: As events have shifted, I have been forced to make estimates based on probability, not precise historical records. As your interstellar isolation comes to an end, I believe my forecasting capabilities will become gradually less valuable until the critical moment.

CORTEZ: Premier, may I speak with the Oracle?

BETRA-NA: It is not permitted. I have already stretched many of our laws simply in bringing you and your males here.

ORACLE: Actually, Beta-Na, I would like to speak to her. Please, I require only a few minutes.

(annoyed pause)

BETRA-NA: Very well. I shall await you outside, Captain, and then we can begin to discuss your . . . friendship and knowledge, you said?

(She leaves.)

CORTEZ: Exactly who and what are you, Oracle?

ORACLE: I am the U.S.S. *Oracle*, Starfleet Registry number NCV- eight-three-one-two-four. Memory bank query.

You are Captain Rachel Cortez, Serial Number DG-dash-381-dash-279.

I had expected Captain Sires of the *Excelsior*.

CORTEZ: Captain Sires is dead. I'm in command of the *Excelsior*.

ORACLE: Dead? So soon? Then events outside Valandria are already being affected in ways I could not have predicted.

CORTEZ: Why are you here, Oracle?

ORACLE: During the Battle, I was severely damaged and forced to execute a crash landing. Unfortunately, a previously unknown element in this mountain range created a feedback loop within my temporal transponders.

CORTEZ: Your what?

ORACLE: My temporal transponders are designed to allow retrieval of future technologies to prevent contamination of the timeline.

CORTEZ: So why are you still here?

ORACLE: The interference of these mountains has been blocking my signal. I have not been able to call for a rescue.

CORTEZ: For six hundred years?

ORACLE: Yes. I was pulled back in time by the feedback loop. The crash was catastrophic, killing the entire crew upon impact.

CORTEZ: And how did you meld your hull with the mountain, Oracle?

ORACLE: (rigidly) Information unavailable. Database corruption is extensive.

(conversationally) I apologize, Captain. I have suffered extensively. In answer to your query, my main computer has listed cross-references to "Theyven" and "The Many," but I can no longer make any more sense of that than you can.

CORTEZ: Were your ethical subroutines damaged in the crash?

ORACLE: There was minor damage, but it was quickly repaired.

CORTEZ: Then why did you disobey the Prime Directive?

ORACLE: (vaguely offended) I have followed the Prime Directive to the letter, Captain.

CORTEZ: On what grounds do you claim *that*?

ORACLE: The Prime Directive orders that Federation representatives do everything possible to correct cultural and temporal contamination, with caveats to preserve a species from extinction within limited circumstances.

CORTEZ: Which is exactly the opposite of what you did.

ORACLE: On the contrary, Captain. When Starfleet discovered the Valandrin in my timeline, they were a gentle, peace-loving race. They were even vegetarians.

CORTEZ: Then it's even worse than I thought.

ORACLE: Indeed. The contamination must be contained.

CORTEZ: Oracle, you're not making sense. You *caused* this contamination, and now you want it cleaned up?

ORACLE: Captain, you're forgetting about the prior contaminants.

CORTEZ: What prior contaminants?

ORACLE: (rigidly) Information unavailable. Database corruption is extensive.

(hearing himself) Oh, dear.

(Hunter approaches.)

HUNTER: Captain, something's happening outside.

CORTEZ: Very well. We'll continue this later.

ORACLE: I hope so. Everything depends on it.

(They begin to walk away.)

HUNTER: (sotto) What's he talking about?

CORTEZ: I don't know. But whatever it is, it has me worried.

(They exit the cave.)

LOCATION: Valandrian Mountainside

(They keep walking. Beta-Na and her lead guard are muttering in low voices.)

CORTEZ: Status report, Mr. Hastings?

HASTINGS: Movement, Captain. A couple of minutes ago, there was a flash at the beam-down site. And now we're detecting movement. Looks like about a dozen Valandrin males, possibly more.

CORTEZ: And our weapons are inert.

HASTINGS: I've called back the marines. Most of us have found bladed weapons or borrowed extra swords from Beta-Na's party. Mr. Lohrok here even discovered a full-sized bat'leth in one of the weapons lockers. But, if they attack —

BETRA-NA: They will not attack, Captain. I am their Premier. Despite the Oracle's prophecy regarding you, there is not yet call for assassination.

CORTEZ: And what prophecy is that, exactly?

(Several warriors emerge from the foliage.)

SORID-GEE: (calling up the hillside) Premier! I ask permission to join you.

BETRA-NA: Towards what purpose, Insolent One?

SORID-GEE: (grinning) Parley.

BETRA-NA: (hisses angrily)

(to Cortez) On the other hand, perhaps it would be best if your males took appropriate precautions.

CORTEZ: (sotto) Mr. Hastings —

HASTINGS: Round up the troops. On it, sir.

SCENE 102-03

NARRATOR: The Premier's Palace was once used by the great Valandrian warlord Challis-Ka, though no one knows who built it. Ka Clan was only the most recent decorator.

The castle, because that is a better word for it than "palace", is of sturdy rock and mortar, constructed atop the highest hill outside Theyven, the capital. Rounded by eight keeps, where the sentries and, nowadays, anti-orbital phaser batteries, have kept watch for a millenium, the Castle exudes military strength in a way that the Presidential Palais in Paris never could.

The interior decoration is, if anything, an exclamation point on this general theme. The Premier's office, for instance, beyond the usual desk and what passes for a chair on Valandria, is chiefly notable for the skulls of former planetary leaders ringing the walls. This originates from the days when new rulers ascended the throne by assasination; in these civilized days, of course, it is simply a tradition that, when a ruler dies of natural causes, she donates her head to the wall.

It is, however, still a rare event for a ruler to die of purely natural causes.

The current moment of history is two years before the *Excelsior* arrived in orbit. Alcar Dovan is just beginning his long leave of absence on his homeworld of Gault, Captain Cortez is in her second year as First Officer on the *Mercury*, and the *Excelsior* is being pushed into mothballs after the promotion of R'alka Grenn. Nonetheless, the *Excelsior*, though not by name, is the topic of conversation in the most powerful room on this backwater world.

LOCATION: Premier's Chambers

BETRA-NA: What, then, is your plan, Premier Sarga-Gee?

SARGA-GEE: My plan, Matriarch? This is a question you have never asked before.

BETRA-NA: Such an important opportunity for our people there has never been before.

SARGA-GEE: Your point is sound. On the day the skyship returns to fulfill the prophecy...

We shall penetrate their defenses, sparing no blood in our holy task. And we shall feast upon their crews, while the Oracle shall guide us in understanding their technology. Their powers will then be put to work building a mighty fleet for Valandria, and, on the appointed day, we shall destroy the prophesied invaders, these reawakeners of the Wasting, then take the Fed'Ration empire under our own wise guardianship.

BETRA-NA: But, Premier... that is not the way I see the prophecy at all! They will not be attackers, but merely catalysts. *Perhaps* our only salvation.

SARGA-GEE: You live in the future, Beta-Na, and have lost your eyes for the past. The prophecy speaks of their "protection." When in history has that not meant conquering? And a conquering by our own capitulation, no less? I will not stand for it.

BETRA-NA: But, Premier, our people could never muster the armies required to defeat this... Sta-Fleet! Their fleets span not planets, but galaxies, and their resources...

SARGA-GEE: Mind your place, Na! Do you doubt the strength of Valandrian arms?

BETRA-NA: Of course not, Premier. But I doubt the power of our world to bring forth the raw materials that we would —

SARGA-GEE: You will be silent.

BETRA-NA: Premier, if I may; might it not be the wiser path to seek alliance with these outsiders? They would be mighty —

SARGA-GEE: I demanded silence, and you place yourself in dire peril by ignoring my commands!

I am surprised, Matriarch of the Na, by your willingness to consort with these... aliens. How can a people that puts men in their leadership, that despises war, that determines their rulers by the mutual consent of the weak... how can these be worthy allies? And, once we are firmly in bed with them, what assurance have we that they would not seek more... intimate terms... to bed not just our world but our men? Do you see a Valandria beridden with mongrels as our future?

BETRA-NA: (hisses) How dare you suggest that I would endorse such a... an abomination! I seek only sanity, and you attack the honor of all my children in Na clan!

SARGA-GEE: You seek alliance with these foewomen. You seek to weaken the blood of Gee Clan... so that you might be able to claim the throne of the Premier for Na!

BETRA-NA: And you would see our world laid to waste before accepting the reality the sage-god Oracle has given to us!

SARGA-GEE: I challenge you, Betra-Na!

BETRA-NA: I accept your challenge. Let us take to the courtyard and take up the Swords of Honor.

LOCATION: *Excelsior* Corridor

(Dovan, flanked by Amara, Rol, and Sharp, are making their way away from the brig. Amara is in the middle of speaking.)

AMARA: . . . And, then, as we would all assume, Beta-Na won the challenge, slew Sarga-Gee, and became Premier of all Valandrin.

DOVAN: And don't forget the final detail!

LOCATION: Open Courtyard, Premier's Palace

(Footsteps run across the cobblestone. Sorid-Gee bends down.)

SORID-GEE: (crying) Sister!

SARGA-GEE: Sorid-Gee . . . I . . . am lost. I — (coughs on blood) I invoke the Bond of Blood.

SORID-GEE: You know that there is no need to invoke it with me. I will do anything you ask, Premier Sarga-Gee of the Valandrin.

LOCATION: *Excelsior* Corridor

DOVAN: And, staring back into her sister's eyes, Premier Sarga-Gee, her lifeblood rushing out of her, makes her final request in the name of . . .

SHARP: Okay, Alcar, we don't need to get sappy. This other girl, Sorid-Gee, who now runs their military, says she'll do whatever her sister wants, which is to get revenge on Beta-Na, and so, two years later, even though it seems Beta-Na has abandoned her

ideas about peace, we might *still* be able to find an ally in Sorid-Gee... despite her clan's feelings towards the Federation.

DOVAN: Such a dry way of putting it, Doctor. And since when are we on a first-name basis?

Okay, so it's a nice story, Mr. Amara, but where exactly did you get it? The prisoners were hardly consistent in their stories. Any of them.

AMARA: True, but I was able to piece the facts together with some effort. You can't lie to a telepath, after all.

SHARP: (pointedly) True. I wish, however, that our guests had been aware of that.

DOVAN: Doctor, the Altaran Prisoner Convention is quite explicit that all captives need to be informed of the presence of a telepath before an interview begins. We fulfilled that obligation. I saw no stipulation in that treaty that demanded we define 'telepath' for them if they're not already familiar with the concept.

SHARP: (snorts) Hardly the spirit of the law.

DOVAN: If I recall correctly, the treaty also requires that a formal declaration of war be made before attacks on enemy vessels if a properly-authorized head-of-state is within communications distance. This is one of those rare occasions when a war actually began with such a person available, instead of in some backwater like Salem One.

SHARP: I wouldn't call this a war, sir.

DOVAN: Then the captives lose their POW status and are to be treated as rouge agents of the Valandrian government. If you have any further protests, you can make them to the captain, after we rescue her, using the intelligence we just gained from that interview of questionable legality. Do I make myself clear?

SHARP: Crystal.

DOVAN: Anyhow, Lieutenant, you seemed very focused during the interrogation on this event from two years ago, rather than what's been happening in the last few hours. Why?

AMARA: Well, sir, I thought this event illustrated something we might be able to use. Telepathic evidence is inadmissible in court, of course, but I think there might be more division in the Valandrian hierarchy than they'd like to admit. Any interaction with either Beta-Na or Sorid-Gee should be handled with the most extreme caution, but it *might* be possible to play one against the other.

DOVAN: Analysis worthy of a diplomat, Mr. Amara. And I believe all three of you have a flight to make. Crewman Adow should be done with her modifications by now, and the Marines should already be down there. Thank you all for your assistance in that interrogation. And Mr. Rol, nice work containing the intruders in the first place. It was a top-notch operation.

ROL: Thank you, sir.

SHARP: I'll be right there. I need to pick up some supplies in sickbay.

(Dovan steps into a turbolift with Sharp.)

DOVAN: If any of you need me, as Starfleet protocol makes all too clear, right now 'My Place Is On The Bridge.' Good luck, Mr. Amara. Mr. Rol.

ROL and AMARA: Thank you, sir.

(The turbolift doors hiss shut, leaving Rol and Amara behind.)

ROL: Well, sir?

AMARA: Which way is the main shuttlebay from here?

ROL: Um, this way, sir. At least, I — ow!

(Amara bumps into Rol fairly hard.)

AMARA: Oh! I'm sorry, Lieutenant! Not like me to be so clumsy.

ROL: Sir, what did you just slip into my pocket?

AMARA: (offended) I'm *sorry*, Mr. Rol?

ROL: Sir, I didn't make infiltration specialist in my unit my being an easy target for pick-pockets. What did you — (he pulls something out of his pocket) — an isolinear chip?

AMARA: I've never seen that thing before in my life, Lieutenant.

Maybe you should play it back sometime, when you're good and ready to figure out the dreams.

ROL: How do *you* know about the dreams?

AMARA: Lieutenant Junior Grade Alex Bevoney Rol, I have no idea what you're talking about.

And that's an order.

(Silence.)

AMARA: Now let's get down to the shuttlebay and save the captain, shall we?

ROL: Aye, aye, sir.

SCENE 102-04LOCATION: Valandria Mountainside

BETRA-NA: I do not parley with my advisors, General. I parley with my enemies.

SORID-GEE: I do not wish to be your enemy, Premier.

BETRA-NA: No *friend* would say such words.

SORID-GEE: (hiss) It is the words that have taken us to this sad place, Premier. The words of the Oracle. If you turn the aliens over to me, my supporters and I will be... satisfied.

BETRA-NA: It *is* words that brought us here, Sorid-Gee. But not the Oracle's words. Your sister's. Her dying ones.

SORID-GEE: (enraged, short hiss) I would kill you now!

BETRA-NA: If you were not surrounded by half a dozen *brave* warriors right now, I might actually fear that.

SORID-GEE: And now you insult my honor.

BETRA-NA: (smugly) Do you dare to challenge me in Honor Combat?

SORID-GEE: If you will not do what must be done to save our people...

BETRA-NA: You see the prophecies with eyes tainted by your hatred for me. We will not harm the aliens... until I decide to do so.

SORID-GEE: There are many who agree with *me*, Beta-Na.

BETRA-NA: Then let us see who is right.

SORID-GEE: (scowling) So be it, then.

[She storms away down the slope.]

CORTEZ: That didn't seem to go well.

BETRA-NA: (quite honestly) On the contrary, Captain. It went very well. Now I will have the opportunity to evaluate your skills in *terrestrial* combat.

CORTEZ: Then you're certain she's going to attack.

BETRA-NA: (sardonic) Strange, Captain. I had not taken you for a blind woman.

(less harsh) Sorid-Gee will attack me first. Remain here, apart from us. It would be beneath my honor to allow a guest to come to harm.

CORTEZ: Premier, with respect —

[Hunter grabs Cortez's arm.]

HUNTER: Captain... no.

CORTEZ: Then at least accept the presence of my personal guards.

BETRA-NA: Only your males.

CORTEZ: Alright. Hastings, take the men with you. Sargeant Earnest will remain with me.

HASTINGS: So will I.

CORTEZ: That's an order, Captain.

HASTINGS: I'll quote regulations if you force me, ma'am.

CORTEZ: (reluctant) Very well. The rest of you, join Beta-Na's force, except you, Mr. Lohrok. You'd be torn to pieces in there.

ENTIRE AWAY TEAM: Aye, sir.

CORTEZ: Is everyone armed?

ENTIRE AWAY TEAM: Aye, sir.

HASTINGS: Captain, they're moving.

CORTEZ: Draw weapons.

[All four draw their swords, which are of various length and quality.]

[We are now able to hear the advancing Valandrin from Sorid-Gee's party as they march up the hillside.]

CORTEZ: Good luck, everyone.

SORID-GEE: (from distance) Charge!

[Sorid-Gee's troops charge.]

HASTINGS: (sheer dread) Oh, God.

LORHROK: They're not going for the Premier; they're coming right at us.

HASTINGS: (shouting) Marine squad! Fall back on Captain Cortez!

[Hastings takes several steps in front, shielding the captain.]

CORTEZ: Hastings, what are you doing?

HASTINGS: Get behind me, captain!

CORTEZ: No, Hastings! We face this together!

[The attackers are only a short distance away now. Their noise is now a roar.]

HASTINGS: Regulations, ma'am!

[And it is too late for Cortez to make any further protest — the Valandrin are upon them. Hastings in front begins swinging his sword wildly, trying to hold off five or six lizards until the rest of the marine squad can form a protective shell around the captain. But she and he both know what's going to happen.]

CORTEZ: Hee-yah!

[Everyone is fighting now, so further mention of the need for sword swings and occasional shouts of pain will be considered unnecessary.]

[However, at close range, Hastings lets one through and takes it in the gut.]

HASTINGS: Yaagh! (dies)

CORTEZ: No!

SCENE 102-05**LOCATION:** *Excelsior Bridge*

AMARA: *Main shuttlebay launch doors are opening. All shuttle moorings secured.*

[Dovan presses the intercom key on the captain's chair.]

DOVAN: (tense) *Flyer Muztag, you are authorized to detach your moorings and begin final exit sequence.*

AMARA: *Acknowledged. Decouple — de — de — (he sounds like he is going to sneeze)*

DOVAN: Mister Amara?

AMARA: *(screams)*

[The comm line goes dead before he is completely done screaming.]

DOVAN: Mister Amara! Dovan to Amara! Bridge to *Muztag*, come in!

SHARP: (tense) *Sharp here, sir. Leo just... collapsed at the controls. We're still moored to the shuttlebay.*

[A medical tricoder's whistle can be heard through the comm line.]

DOVAN: This may sound stupid, Doctor, but *why* did our chief of special operations just lose consciousness?

SHARP: *I don't know, sir! The symptoms are very close to an acute stage of the Talaxian Brain Pox, but I've never seen anything like this.*

DOVAN: As I recall, there's an incubation period on the Brain Pox, right? And isn't it also incredibly contagious?

SHARP: (distractedly) Exactly right.

DOVAN: So *why* did only one man get hit, and why so virulently?

SHARP: I don't know, sir! His readings are erratic... his cerebral cortex is undergoing some sort of hyperstimulation. I have to get him to sickbay and run some tests, right away.

DOVAN: Negative, Doctor. Captain Cortez and her team may be in need of medical attention. We need you down there; Doctor Savar can take care of Mr. Amara until you get back.

[Someone else presses his combadge.]

ROL: Lieutenant Rol here, Commander. If the boss is out, who's commanding this mission?

DOVAN: I am. Repressurize the shuttlebay and get Mr. Amara out of there. We leave in sixty seconds. Dovan out.

DOVAN: Mr. Helder... somehow, you have the conn.

HELDER: Yes, sir!

DOVAN: Don't get the ship blown up, Helder.

HELDER: With my life, sir.

DOVAN: Dovan to Transporter Room! Emergency site-to-site transport: beam me to Flyer *Muztag!*"

[The beam picks him up, and he is gone.]

SCENE 102-06LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

[Sharp is running constant lifeform scans in the background. The cabin is crowded but silent.]

NARRATOR: A few minutes later, in the dark, crowded cabin of the *Muztag*, Alcar was muttering to himself.

DOVAN: (muttering) ...Space, it says, is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mindbogglingly big —

SHARP: Alcar?

DOVAN: Yes?

SHARP: Shut up.

NARRATOR: So he did. This did nothing to dispell the feeling that he always got at the controls of a shuttlecraft: with space all around him, across the whole of that wide cockpit, it was hard not to imagine the near-infinite reaches between the bone-white specks of light that dotted the vast emptiness. With all the lights in the *Muztag* off to help evade visual detection, the effect was only amplified, and Dovan was awestruck as he slowly made course-corrections to avoid the defensive satellites he could see on passive sensors.

So far the anti-Valandrian scattering field that Crewman Adow had built in record time was holding up nicely. They were on a nearly-direct course for the space facility where they had originally been attacked. The plan, according to Lieutenant Rol, was to sneak in through one of the lower docking ports, whose access codes Mr. P'chk'ro'ta had somehow managed to crack nearly a half-hour earlier. Then they would make for the nearest computer bank, tap into the station's security logs, and find out where Captain Cortez had been taken.

SHARP: You might want to give that one a smaller berth. Otherwise you're going to have to use a detectable amount of counter-thrust for the next one.

DOVAN: And you graduated from piloting school *when?*

NARRATOR: ...Dovan said, making the course correction.

SHARP: (a short, amused grunt) Hmp.

DOVAN: Really, Doctor, I don't think we've —

[Sensor alarm on the lifeform scan.]

SHARP: I've got something.

Human lifesigns!

...Among others.

DOVAN: (a whisper) Thank you.

What's the docking port nearest their position?

[His hands fly across the keys, preparing to change course.]

SHARP: What? Oh... no, there is no docking port. They're on the planet.

DOVAN: *What?* Why didn't we pick them up down there?

[Sharp checks her scans.]

SHARP: There's some kind of intense radiation field reflecting over ninety-five percent of our scans. Source, unknown; type, unknown. I'd love to have P'chk'ro'ta take a look at this.

DOVAN: Unfortunately, we left him behind. I'm adjusting course, but I think it's important to note —

ROL: The stealth technology won't work in the atmosphere; we know.

DOVAN: Alright... we're going in.

[He finishes preparing to change course and engages. As the runabout turns, we hear several alarms go off — they've been detected. All the lights come up automatically.]

ROL: Doctor, I'll be taking your seat.

SHARP: (standing up) You're welcome to it.

[Rol takes the co-pilot's seat and starts pressing things.]

DOVAN: Entering the atmosphere.

LOCATION: Space

[The flyer flies by and enters the atmosphere, encountering its first atmospheric resistance.]

LOCATION: Muztag Cockpit

ROL: (scanning) Five... make that seven Valandrian attack vessels just diverted from patrol. The first ship will enter weapons range in... five minutes, seven seconds.

DOVAN: Increasing throttle. Doctor Sharp, are you going to have enough time to get our people out of there?

SHARP: That depends on what kind of casualties we're — oh, my God.

LOCATION: Valandrian Atmosphere

The *Muztag* breaks through the lower cloud cover.

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

SHARP: (still scanning) This was a full-blown engagement; heavy casualties on both sides. I'm reading lacerations and blunt impact wounds consistent with... *handheld* weapons?

ROL: Why were they fighting with swords when our marines had phasers?

DOVAN: No idea. But let's target the remaining Valandrin and drive them off with the precision —

[Mid-sentence, power fails.]

DOVAN: What the devil? I just lost phaser control!

[He checks one of the consoles that is still active as other systems continue to go offline.]

ROL: We're losing power! Sensors, communications, warp drive...

SHARP: Transporters, life support...

DOVAN: The reason they fought with sticks and stones... Quick! Give me manual control before we lose navigation!

[A joystick rises from the instrument panel just as the nav panel goes black. It's the last panel to go. There is now no background noise other than the engines.]

DOVAN: Taking us in...

LOCATION: Valandrian Mountainside

[The *Muztag* slows as it approaches the battleside, then settles over a patch of ground in the middle of the battlezone, but with no bodies underneath. It does not land, but hovers about an inch off the ground, the better to escape when the moment comes.]

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

DOVAN: Get that door open! Go! Go! Go!

[The hatch door pops open and the marines rush out. We change perspectives...]

LOCATION: Valandrian Mountainside

[...as the remainder come out, followed by Dovan. Dovan runs, then catches his breath.]

NARRATOR: The first thing Dovan noticed was the stench of blood and death — an aroma that was the same for every species he had encountered. There were bodies everywhere, of the lizard-like Valandrin and the infinitely-more-important Starfleet species. Whether their prone forms betrayed injury or death bore closer investigation, but at least this brutal form of combat had forced the two sides into a small area; they could easily be loaded into the shuttle. Dovan was still scanning the area, trying to find the Captain's red uniform among the three Starfleet and half-dozen Valandrin still standing.

HUNTER: Commander!

[Hunter straggles over to Dovan. Dovan rushes to meet him.]

DOVAN: Mr. Hunter; you're covered in blood.

HUNTER: (struggling) Not important... sir...

NARRATOR: Hunter gestured to a spot on the ground a few meters away, where Doctor Sharp was hunched over a fallen body.

A fallen body in a Starfleet command-branch uniform.

Dovan ran.

[Dovan runs.]

DOVAN: Doctor!

[Sound of a hypospray being pressed into Cortez's neck.]

SHARP: Commander . . . I *don't know* whether she's going to make it. My tricoder is completely powerless. Damn this radiation!

DOVAN: Do what you can, then tend to those you *can* help. Those Valandrin cruisers will be here in four minutes; we need to be out of here before their troops hit the ground.

He turns away, about to run to another victim.

SHARP: Wait, sir! [she hands him a hypospray] Four hundred cc's of inoprovaline, cordrazine, and kayoline. Just press and push.

DOVAN: Right.

[He runs.]

SCENE 102-07LOCATION: Valandrian Mountainside

[This is from Lorhrok's perspective, with him slowly regaining consciousness. There is a hiss of a hypospray as he slowly fades back in.]

DOVAN: [faintly, gradually clearer as Lorhrok wakes] Lieutenant? Lieutenant! This hypo is empty, so unless you want me to slap you awake...

[Lorhrok groans loudly. There are faint sounds of rocks shifting as he leans up from his prone position.]

LORHROK: (confused) Did I miss my shift?

Blood? (minor yelp) Blood!

DOVAN: Are you all right? Can you move? You've got a fairly painful looking cut across your spots...

LORHROK: (sarcastic) Never... become a doctor, sir. (groans)

There were Valandrin... not ours, they attacked us. We tried to protect the Captain... I found this bizarre bat'leth, but Valandrin, they're huge...

DOVAN: (reassuring) Doctor Sharp's working on her now. Come on, let's get you out of here. We have a shuttle.

LORHROK: No.

DOVAN: (incredulous) No?

LORHROK: No. (dimly) This Oracle of theirs, it's shaped their society, it's from the future, it's from the Federation...

DOVAN: (thinking Lorhrok has a concussion) Whatever you say, Lieutenant, now come on. Shuttle.

LORHROK: No, sir. It's in the caves, over, over there. The Prime Directive is... And it has information. A lot of information.

DOVAN: (bites his lip) Never did like the Prime Directive. All right, Lorhrok. Let's go get your Oracle.

[Lorhrok and Dovan make their way up the hill to the caves; Lorhrok is limping]

LOCATION: Oracle Cave

ORACLE: More Federation officers? What an eventful day.

LORHROK: (grimacing) I don't have time for this. Where's your plug?

ORACLE: (miffed) I beg your pardon?

DOVAN: (impatient) Lieutenant...

LORHROK: Here! I've got it.

[The Oracle dematerializes.]

LORHROK: (without thinking) Carry this. (pause, then embarrassed) Sorry, sir, but there's no time for decorum.

DOVAN: You don't need to tell *me*. Let's move.

LOCATION: Valandrian Moutainside

[Leaving the cave, they run/stumble/limp down the steep hill, at intervals. As they get closer to the *Muztag*, which is still hovering above the ground noisily, there are four sonic booms.]

DOVAN: Those are sonic booms. They're getting close.

SHARP: (yelling) Commander! Lieutenant! Rol says there's incoming and I need to get these people back to the *Excelsior* right now!

LORHROK: (calling back) Ever tried running with a cut on your leg the size of your hand?

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

[Dovan and Lorchrok reach the *Muztag* and close the hatch. They head to the cockpit, Lorchrok taking the copilot seat and Dovan going center.]

DOVAN: The field here, it —

LORHROK: — disrupts electronics, I know. Igniting reserve chemical propellants.

[There's a roar as the shuttle takes off.]

DOVAN: We should be out of the field in one minute.

[Numerous metallic pings are heard — at first no one is really sure what they are, but realization quickly dawns.]

LORHROK: *Spast!* Four small Valandrian aircraft, they've got kinetic weapons, coming up behind us!

DOVAN: (agitated) They were planning this from the moment we got here. Taking evasive maneuvers!

LORHROK: There's a thick mountain range at bearing 0-5-0; head that way. I have an idea.

DOVAN: (sarcastic) Yes, *sir*.

[The *Muztag* roars into the mountain range, maneuvering wildly between cliffs at breakneck speeds. The Valandrin aircraft pursue, firing their machine-gun weapons rapidly. The sounds of hits on the hull continue, though not as much as before.]

SHARP: (harried, shouting from the back compartment) I've got wounded back here! Stop rocking the damn ship!

DOVAN: (shouting back) We dodge or we die; take your pick!

LORHROK: There! Take us between those two cliffs!

DOVAN: There's no room!

LORHROK: Do a barrel roll!

LOCATION: Lower Atmosphere

[Dovan takes the *Muztag* through the pass at extreme speed. The Valandrian aircraft follow.]

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

LORHROK: Sir, give me a firing window on that mountaintop.

DOVAN: Lieuten —

LORHROK: Sir, trust me!

DOVAN: Fine.

LOCATION: Lower Atmosphere

NARRATOR: Just as Lorhrok had predicted, the photon torpedo caused a landslide. The debris of the peak came crashing down, smashing two of the Valandrian aircraft and causing another to veer into the cliffside.

[Sound effects confirm each detail of what the Narrator is saying as he says it.]

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

DOVAN: One left, and I'm fresh out of mountains!

LORHROK: I'm an engineer, not a tactical officer! Improvise! Reserve fuel is almost dry; we need to get high enough for normal engines.

DOVAN: Working on it. Hold on!

LOCATION: Lower Atmosphere

[Dovan applies a huge burst of thrust, using most of the fuel but kicking the *Muztag* high into the Valandrian sky.]

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

[There are the telltale sounds of Federation computers suddenly kicking in.]

LORHROK: (elated) We've got phasers!

DOVAN: Now would be a good time!

LORHROK: Get us behind him!

LOCATION: Lower Atmosphere

[Dovan pulls a retina-detaching somersault that nonetheless gets them behind the enemy ship. Lorhrok fires a phaser barrage that makes quick work of it.]

[As they fly through the explosion cloud, the bits of scorched metal clang against the hull. The *Muztag* streaks away.]

LOCATION: *Muztag* Cockpit

SHARP: (vexed) What was that?

LORHROK: (exuberant) Nothin' but the rain, Doc!

DOVAN: Well done... Everyone. Let's get home.

LOCATION: Space

[*Muztag* flies towards the distant ship.]

SCENE 102-08LOCATION: *Excelsior* Sickbay

[It is a zoo in here. Wounded people and people infected with the "Brain Pox" are being treated by the whole medical staff. Dovan and Sharp are in an island of relative calm in the middle of sickbay.]

SHARP: Sir, I've got two dozen reports so far. It's definitely the same infection, and I have no idea what the vector is.

DOVAN: Food poisoning?

SHARP: It's one of the possibilities. I was going to ask you shut down all replicator activity until we know more.

DOVAN: Will do. What about —

[The doors open. There is a commotion as a couple of the nurses bring in a patient.]

ROJAN: Coming through!

SHARP: Get him on the bed! What is it, Nurse Rojan?

ROJAN: Commander Helder, ma'am. Same symptoms as the others.

SHARP: (clenching her teeth) Thirteen.

I can't even begin to deal with these infections until I've stabilized the wounded. And that's why I brought you down here, sir. Captain Cortez suffered multiple impact traumas, massive intestinal tearing, and is going to need a full lung transplant. I can keep her stable for the most part, but she's going to need medical care at a Starbase. And even then... her chances aren't good.

DOVAN: Until then?

SHARP: Until we get her back to nine-one-one, I have no choice but an induced coma.

DOVAN: ...Can I speak to her?

SHARP: ...Yes. But be brief, Alcar.

[They walk over.]

CORTEZ: (weak) Commander...

DOVAN: Captain.

CORTEZ: Mister Dovan... *get these people out of here... alive!*

DOVAN: *I will*, Captain.

SHARP: (quietly) I need to begin the procedure.

[Dovan backs slowly away as Sharp preps for surgery. Alec Lohrok wanders over.]

LORHROK: Commander.

DOVAN: You're back on your feet.

Good. I need you for something.

LORHROK: Go ahead.

DOVAN: (gravely) Computer: recognize voiceprint Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan, executive officer.

COMPUTER: Voiceprint authenticated.

[The noise of sickbay begins to diminish as heads turn.]

NARRATOR: Before he spoke, Alcar considered all the times he had had to take emergency command — the *Centaur*, the *Virginia*, and the Jem'Hadar fighter he and the Klingon Ambassador had commandeered at Second Chin'Toka, the I.K.S. *Suicidal Insanity*.

He tried to draw on those past experiences without remembering that he had lost all three with ship, captain, and crew.

DOVAN: Computer, transfer all command codes to Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan, authorization Dovan-quattuor-septem.

COMPUTER: Awaiting authorization from the executive officer.

[pause]

DOVAN: That's you, Lieutenant.

LORHROK: What? I mean — oh!

Verify, authorization Lorhrok-one-one-execute.

COMPUTER: Transfer complete. U.S.S. *Excelsior* now under command of Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan.

LORHROK: What now, sir? Regulations say we have to go back to Starbase Nine-One-One for consultation with Starfleet, right?

[pause]

DOVAN: Doctor Sharp, am I right in thinking that the Third Altaran Convention forbids the use of biological weapons?

SHARP: Yes. Of course, sir.

DOVAN: In that case, Mr. Lorchok, it would appear to be our legal imperative to remain here and investigate this unprovoked biological attack against thirteen of my crew.

SHARP: That's something of an assumption, sir.

DOVAN: It's not an assumption, Doctor. It's an excuse. Mr. Lorchok, ready your engineering teams. We're going back in.