

Star Trek: Excelsior
Season Five: The Round Table

Vignette:

“Infest or Infect”

by Alexandra Whitley

INT. Excelsior Sickbay

MAJOR

Charlton, get that patient on the biobed now!

SHARP

If your marines had been more careful, I might have more patients, Major.

MAJOR

We brought down the entire cave on their heads. They're resistant to phaser fire. The captured bluegill [is ready for your attention, Melissa].

SHARP

(interrupts)

Zero.

MAJOR

Excuse me, ma'am?

SHARP

They call themselves the Zero. Stand back while I prepare.

MAJOR

Charlton, dismissed.

SFX: We hear the marine leave, then the sounds of special preparations for a biobed underneath the following dialogue.

MAJOR

I wasn't aware we owed them any courtesy, ma'am.

SHARP

I'm sorry, have we started using slurs for any other civilizations on this ship? Well, not in my sickbay.

MAJOR

You of all people should have some feelings about these parasites.

SHARP

A Zero violated my body, stole my identity, used both to harm the people I love, and attempted to murder me. (blink) And I think we know where the galaxy would be if we began treating any species as responsible for the harm that one of their number has done to us.

MAJOR

With all due respect, ma'am, the one in this sickbay isn't any better.

SHARP

Any Zero we've had opportunity to communicate with is at minimum an attempted murderer. They murder people in order to gain what we take for granted: touch, sight, and embodiment.

MAJOR

That doesn't justify it, ma'am.

SHARP

Of course not. *And they know this too.* Some feel guilt or shame. They tie themselves into logical knots trying to justify it to themselves. They're capable of choosing not to kill.

MAJOR

They're built to possess and kill sentient beings, ma'am. It's how their biology evolved.

SHARP

Even if we grant that they're natural killers, they're capable of choosing not to kill-- today, and the next day, and the day after. Any being with the gifts of self-awareness and moral reasoning is capable of making better choices.

(Melissa is not aware that her first sentence channeled Kirk--they just have a similar place from which they draw this moral sentiment.)

MAJOR

And what better choices does a Zero have?

SHARP

Are they able to inhabit the psychic environments they can generate? Or maybe they could grow non-sentient anthropomorphic clones? I don't know.

MAJOR

I don't know either, and I'm fairly certain it's not our problem. Ma'am.

SHARP

It is exactly our problem if we want any outcome beyond either their annihilation or ours. The Zero who refuse to take hosts--how many might there be, and what happens to them?

MAJOR

They probably have even more problems with their careers than you do.

SHARP

They probably do. (She is scanning her patient.) Now if you'll stand back, I'll extract the Zero from the--mother of God!

MAJOR

Ma'am?

SHARP

The host. She's Vidiiian. And her brain scans show that she's still alive.

MAJOR

Aren't the Vidiiians extinct, Ma'am? They were removed from the Starfleet list of active threats for a reason.

SHARP

Yes. Reportedly the Phage virus worsened and killed them entirely. But possession by Zero is known to heighten the physical abilities of the host.

(A beat while the tricorder beeps worryingly.)

She still has the Phage. I'm collecting scans of what Zero possession is doing with her immune system.

MAJOR

Could removing the parasite allow the Phage to proceed again?

SHARP

It will. And it's still the only way to save her.

(blink)

Unless... Beetlejuice. If we had a dose of Beetlejuice. The inoculation against the Zero mind control leaves the physical advantages intact.

MAJOR

There aren't enough doses. And to be blunt, ma'am, this woman couldn't even be allowed to know it exists. The safety of the galaxy depends on that secrecy.

SHARP

(sighs deeply)

I've had time to refine the separation of a Zero from a humanoid. I'll have it done in a few seconds.

MAJOR

But intentionally leaving in a parasite for the physical advantages. I hadn't considered it. A force of marines immune to standard phaser settings...

SHARP

Major! I don't want to hear this. And I need to concentrate. Standby.

We hear some possibly distressing sound effects of the parasite being removed, then making some noises when out.

MAJOR

Now what do we do with it?

SHARP

What we would do with any criminal apprehended outside Federation jurisdiction: putting him in confinement.

MAJOR

A blue--a Zero would be too much of a risk in a brig cell, ma'am. Too much possibility of its hiding or creeping into something.

SHARP

Yes, that's why after our first encounter with them I prepared these jars. Computer, extend force field around Zero holding jar 1. Beam the insectoid into holding jar 1.

Now, restrict the force field to surround holding jar 1, authorization Sharp-beta-3.

(We hear each of these things happen.)

MAJOR

What happens if there's a power failure, ma'am?

SHARP

Then we find out if a Zero can break through transparent aluminum or unscrew a childproof cap from the inside. Personally, I think it has a better chance of breaking the aluminum.

(beat)

The patient should wake up without outside stimulation in a few moments.

TENAYSA

(Yelps slightly as she comes awake)

Oh--oh! What is this dream?

(blink)

How are there two of you? Why don't you look like me this time?

SHARP

You're not in a dream. This is reality, and that is your body. The parasite is in this jar. He can't hurt you now.

TENAYSA

(Softly)

By the Great Surgeon. I'm me. I'm me. I'm me.

SHARP

My name is Melissa. I'm a doctor, aboard the Starship Excelsior of the United

Federation of Planets. He's the Major, but he's not as bad as that sounds. What's your name?

TENAYSA

I'm Tenaysa. Am I really me? Is this real?

MAJOR

It is entirely real. What do you remember?

TENAYSA

Every night. *Every night*. Most of them take dream suppressants. But this one didn't. He *enjoyed* taunting me.

SHARP

That sounds terrible. I only had a short time of awareness with mine.

TENAYSA

You too?

SHARP

Yes.

TENAYSA

They say it's cohabitation. But it isn't. It isn't at all.

SHARP

No. No, it's not.

TENAYSA

What happens to me now?

MAJOR

Ordinarily, we'd return you to your people. But... I don't believe there are any people to return you to.

TENAYSA

No, there aren't. When there were a handful of us left, some of us accepted the offer

from the Zero. They keep a small farm of us now. With the Phage held at bay, our unusually evolved immune system keeps them healthy. No Zero with a Vidiian host ever catches a cold or an ear infection.

SHARP

May I scan you to check your condition?

TENAYSA

Yes.

SHARP

(while scanning)

Tenaysa, this may be difficult to hear.

TENAYSA

You don't need to tell me. The Phage has resumed its course.

SHARP

Yes.

TENAYSA

Sickness is normality for Vidiians. This is part of owning my body again.

SHARP

That's a remarkable response.

TENAYSA

Anything is better than watching out of his eyes. I was in my death throes, he told me. I'd have been gone after much longer.

MAJOR

With the parasite in, you die a slow death of the mind. With the parasite out, a slow death of the body.

SHARP

With my readings of what the Zero did with your physiology, I can keep you alive for longer than a Vidiian would normally last after the Phage mutated into its more rapid

progression.

(blink)

I'm sorry to say that isn't long.

MAJOR

It's impossible to have the bug in and give you control. I'm sorry.

TENAYSA

And have him looking out of my eyes instead? I would never inflict that on anyone. Not anyone, ever.

(blink)

It's better that there's no way to have them in but not in control. Can you imagine a sapient species being ingested and held a captive consciousness by anyone who wanted to be stronger, or not be ill?

(beat while Melissa and the Major take this in)

SHARP

Jesus.

(blink)

You're right.

MAJOR

It's the kind of thing our people simply wouldn't think of.

SHARP

But other people would.

(Of course, they did think of exactly this about two minutes ago. Sharp would have said what Tenaysa did if she'd continued discussing the topic with the Major instead of focusing on her patient, but she's a little distressed that she *didn't* say it. The Major, meanwhile--how much would he overlook this moral question, if ordered?)

TENAYSA

I get a sense of people very quickly. And I'm glad you're the people who saved me. Thank you.

SHARP

You are more than welcome. You probably want to spend every minute you can awake in the world. But I'm going to need to put you under for a few minutes so that I can administer treatment for the Phage. Do I have your permission to do this?

TENAYSA

(blink)

Yes. I trust you.

SHARP

Okay. I'm going to come close and use this hypospray.

(Sharp is using training about being very explicit about space and consent when working with survivors of violation of bodily autonomy. We hear a gentle approach, the hypospray, and Tenaysa leaning back onto the couch. No further sounds of instruments; it is quiet. Beat.)

She's under. Major, it's other people who would seriously consider using the Zero like that, right? Not us?

MAJOR

Of course, ma'am. Other people.

Several beats of silence endure before the ending credits begin.