

## Part 1: The Basking Lizards

It is 45 million years ago.

On a distant planet, amphibious lizardlike creatures relax in a pond near where a river enters the sea. They vaguely resemble Dimetrodon except that they have four heat-exchange structures on their backs that resemble the wings of a housefly.

There are two suns in the sky. However, something is strange about the smaller of them. It does not look quite like a star. It is cloudier, chaotic, and its color is purple.

One of the creatures bites and chews away reeds from the edge of the pond. As it grabs the reeds with its forward fins, we see that these fins are like those of a mudskipper and one of the spines is set low in a way that it might eventually evolve into a thumb. The creature places the reeds into an orderly pile.

The unusual second star is now four times the diameter of the first.

The creatures move mud and gravel around the bottom of the pond with their forward fins. The mud forms a pair of walls lining the entrance to the pond. Fish swim into the pond, circle around, and meet the wall. The fish cannot find the exit. One of the creatures dips its snout into the water and comes up with a fish in its teeth.

A large glowing purple cloud now covers a quarter of the sky.

The creatures screech at each other as the wind blows wildly and a purple hue covers everything. They screech at the one of them who has built a nest in the reeds and does not want to leave. One of the creatures steps forward, pushes the mother aside, and takes an egg in its mouth. The others do the same. As they leave the pond, one of the creatures stops to pick up a sharpened stick with its forefin as it follows the others into the ocean.

The wind blows. The purple color deepens. The water boils.

## Part 2: First Encounter

A very old Daedalus-class Federation exploration ship floats through space. It is so old that the habitat section is a ball rather than a saucer.

The captain's quarters are little more than a bunk bed and enough space to climb into it. The captain, a human woman with black hair, is wearing a spacesuit without its helmet. She reads a report into her visual log.

"This is Captain Amanda Stevens of the Icarus. We made it through the front of the shockwave with no problems and we have already made first contact with a species that lives inside the nova region. They're cute little guys. They look kinda like fairies with lizard faces."

The door buzzer rings. Captain Stevens quickly finishes the log.

"I am sending a probe back out of the nebula to broadcast this message so you know we made it. We have a lot of exploring to do, and I look forward to doing it. Captain Stevens out."

She shuts off the recorder and speaks to the door. "Come in." The door opens, and the captain greets her chief engineer. "Hey, handsome."

"Hey, Mandy." The engineer returns the greeting, and his eyes return her feelings. The two lovers try to hug as closely as their spacesuits allow them to.

Captain Stevens also sees a sign of worry in the engineer's eyes. "You look distracted. Is something up?"

The engineer sighs. "We've had three pressure spikes outside of acceptable tolerance levels. I'm going to have a look at it in the morning."

"Morning," Captain Stevens repeats wistfully. "I miss mornings."

The engineer smiles. "It was a figure of speech. Morning in space is whenever we wake up together."

The captain smiles and lies down in her bunk. "I can go for that."

The engineer leans down to kiss her, and climbs into the bunk to join her.

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The voice of a shouting crewman pierces through the darkened bedroom.

"CAPTAIN!"

The sleeping captain stirs in his bed as the crewman continues shouting.

"The alien ship just exploded!"

The captain stands up. The poor light provides little more than an outline of his shape. He is not human.

The half-asleep captain stumbles onto the bridge. He and his crew are evolved descendants of the lizard-like creatures seen earlier. A viewscreen shows the remains of the exploded Icarus. The ship's spherical habitat section floats alone in space, its rear side heavily damaged by the explosion that vaporized the engine section behind it.

The bleary-eyed captain issues orders. "Search for survivors. Scavenge everything we can from it. Contact the Admiralty! If this Federation blames us for the loss of their ship, we will have another war."

(Show the opening credits.)

### Part 3: Another War

A Bronze Age army marches on a small coastal city overlooking a great sea. Catapult-thrown stones smash through the city's brick walls. Yelling soldiers charge through the breach, taking their swords and spears to the city's inhabitants. All people on both sides Vulcan, and they bleed green.

Inside the city's inner citadel, robed scholars make adjustments to a wood and metal treelike contraption. The priests desperately pray.

"Oh great Goddess Ashtira, respond to our call!"

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"Ashtira, your holy city is under attack!"

There is a bright flash of white light as a Vulcan woman appears among them, wearing a bright golden dress. Their goddess Ash-Tira looks at the device with contempt and turns up her nose. "You are doing it completely wrong. You are lucky I was bored and happened to look in your direction because I would have never heard you through this thing. These emitters have aluminium coating, but on these three no one applied Surnak's chemical process to create the surface patterns that can quantize a subspace wave."

One scholar tells another "Write this down!" The other scholar grabs a quill from an inkwell and hurriedly takes notes on a small piece of parchment.

Ash-Tira continues complaining. "The golden threads need to be pure to three nines and consistent. Some of these are cut with silver. Some are longer than the others. You won't get a stable wave out of this. The wood is northern yew for a reason and needs to be replaced before it dries out. This strut is hill pine. It will collapse the wave. And this uranium is completely spent. You do not even have a power source. How did you ever expect it to work?"

One of the priests answers honestly. "We prayed very devoutly."

The scholar who had taken notes places the scroll in a black jar.

The citadel shakes as it is struck directly by a catapult. The walls hold. A priest takes the opportunity to appeal to his goddess again. "Lady Ashtira! The city is under attack!"

Ash-Tira shrugs. "So?"

The priest explains the obvious. "If the attackers destroy the city, they will desecrate your work! The laws that you gave us in your wisdom will be forgotten!"

Ash-Tira huffs. "I wanted to see if you pitiful creatures could organize yourselves to accomplish greater things than breeding, exhausting your resources, and starving yourselves out. As it turns out, you could not even organize a defense of your own people."

The priest pleads defensively. "We determined that warfare is wasteful and serves no purpose. We thought this was in line with your wisdom."

Ash-Tira lectures the foolish pries. "And so you allow the next band of raiders to pass by, or wildlife, to destroy everything that you worked for?" She leans forward and points at her head. "You have brains! Think! Use reason!"

The priest hesitantly makes a suggestion that is against everything that he has ever learned or taught. "Should we go to war?"

Ash-Tira ridicules him. "With what? Pencils? It is too late for that. If I gave you weapons you would only get yourselves killed. You might want to consider begging for mercy." Seeing the priests drop to their knees before her, Ash-Tira adds a correction. "Not to me. To them."

Ash-Tira walks to a window and sees the invaders rampaging through a market square outside of the citadel. A smile appears on her face. "On second thought, this might be fun."

Ash-Tira disappears in a flash of light.

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In a flash of light, Ash-Tira appears in the middle of the market square wearing a golden plate-mail bikini and carrying a spear.

A few invaders happened to have been looking in her direction. They are shocked by this woman's sudden appearance, but they quickly form a defensive line when she charges at them. Ash-Tira takes one down with a spear to the face while her unarmored body is impaled on the defenders' spears. Green blood rolls down her back from the wounds. There is a flash of white light, and she disappears.

In another flash of light, Ash-Tira reappears in the middle of the market square. She is unharmed. She raises her spear and charges again, more carefully this time. She engages her opponents with skill, wounding two before she is surrounded and stabbed by her numerous opponents. As she falls to her knees, there is a flash of light and she disappears.

In a flash of light, Ash-Tira reappears in the middle of the market square. She is unharmed. She smiles with confidence as she advances on the enemy. Several of the invaders start to fall back. Their captain yells. "Hold steady! We have beaten her before and we can do it again!"

Ash-Tira laughs. "You amuse me."

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Elsewhere in the city, one of the invading soldiers reports to a superior. "The group in the central market encountered a woman warrior who has killed six men. They say that they have killed her several times but she comes back to life."

The superior officer has studied the local mythology. "The legends say that this city has a guardian, an invincible goddess. Tell everyone not to engage her, and to simply pillage and withdraw."

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Ash-Tira walks through the city streets with her spear in hand. An enemy soldier sees her, and runs away. She pushes open the half-broken door of a nearby building and sees two enemy soldiers inside, in the process of looting the place. The soldiers see her, and they run away.

Ash-Tira continues walking. "This is no fun," she complains to herself. She snaps her fingers and disappears.

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The king of the invading army speaks down to one of his superior officers who had given the order to withdraw, "You will explain to me why my army is retreating from a city after we have breached its walls."

The officer explains to his king, as he had explained to the soldier. "The city is protected by a warrior goddess who cannot be killed. To be precise, she can be killed but she keeps coming back. Forever."

Ash-Tira appears beside the two in a flash of light. "Hi there! I overheard you talking about me." She smiles smugly.

The invading king actively tries to refuse to believe what his own eyes had just seen. "So you are the woman who claims to be a goddess?" he asks with feigned skepticism.

The officer speaks for her. "She makes a convincing case."

The king turns to his priests. "Let us see what our Lord has to say about her."

The priests nod, and remove the lid from a box that is half the size of a coffin. Smoke and lightning emerge from the box, rising up and soon filling the sky. The face of a bearded Vulcan male appears in the smoke and speaks in a booming voice. "I am the Lord of this world! You will kneel before me!"

The king and his army kneel.

Ash-Tira only looks up playfully. "Oh, how cute!" She snaps her fingers, and the Lord and his smoke and thunder disappear in a flash of light.

Every jaw in the invading king's army is dropped in shock. The invaders slowly rise and turn their faces to the goddess who had defeated their god in an instant. The goddess speaks to them, and what she says is not anything that they had expected.

"I am going to leave. Do what you want to the city. I don't care." Ash-Tira turns to give a few last words to one soldier who had killed her several times in the marketplace. "You were fun." She then disappears in a flash of light.

The king and his men look with astonishment at the empty space where the goddess had been. The king bravely walks across the empty space, risking offending the all-powerful. Nothing happens. A soldier's shout attracts his attention. "My king!"

A pair of soldiers guide the priests from the citadel. A soldier introduces them. "The leaders of the city have come to discuss terms of surrender. They ask only that they be permitted to record the teachings of their goddess."

The priests fall to their knees and bow. The invading king looks down upon them and smiles.

#### Part 4: Archaeology

The scene of the ancient siege is barely recognizable. The land is now desert. The greenery is gone. There are no crops, no grasses, no weeds. Nothing.

The city is gone. Some large mobile machinery is present in the area of where the city had been.

The sea is gone. The coastline is now a bluff. In the far distance, in the middle of where the sea had been, can be seen skyscrapers.

A transporter beam places a Vulcan man onto the planet. He smiles with joy and drops to his knees. He bends over and scoops up two handfuls of sand, laughing as it falls through his fingers. He looks up at the sky. A tear of joy rolls down his cheek. Then he composes himself, stands up, brushes the dirt off his clothes, and walks towards the bluff.

A Vulcan engineer is checking the monitor on the side of a large piece of equipment when the stranger introduces himself.

"Hello, my name is Surek. I am a free trader. I normally do business around the Klingon frontier and I shall be on Vulcan only for a short time..."

The engineer responds with typical Vulcan dispassion before the trader has finished his introduction. "We have arrangements for all of our materials. It is unlikely that we will have need to purchase anything that you might be selling."

Surek sees that he will need to get to the point quickly. "Ah, but I am buying! My ship's scanners show that there used to be a city where you are planning to build... whatever it is that you are planning to build."

The engineer again speaks without looking at Surek's face. "It will be a residential district overlooking the valley."

Surek smiles. "A city, then! Atop an old city. Now it would be logical to expect that your excavations might uncover artifacts from the old city. I know of buyers who would make a good trade for anything from an ancient culture. They place a high value on things such as artworks, musical instruments, or anything with writing on it, but they will also pay for such simple things as pottery or kitchen utensils. If you dig up a spoon, I will buy it from you."

The engineer dismisses the trader. "It would not be logical to interrupt the pace of construction to search for ancient garbage. There are others who rely on us keeping to our schedule. If you interfere with my work, I will have to summon civil security to expel you from the property."

As if on cue, two Vulcan security officers beam in. One of the security officers speaks. "We are from the civil security bureau. We tracked an unauthorized transporter beam to this location from a vessel that is not authorized to be in orbit."

The trader speaks to them. "But I am a licensed trader."

The guard explains why this is insufficient. “The license is valid for transport through Federation territory. Porting at Vulcan requires a separate license from planetary authorities, and the license is in the name of a {{{TODO: alien species}}} named Tzzak.”

“Tzzak owns the ship,” Surek explains. “I work for him.”

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On the bridge of a Federation ship, the Tellarite captain receives a report from the Vulkan security guard.

“The Romulan spy has departed the planet. We would appreciate receiving the results of a second scan of his ship.”

“Make it happen,” the captain tells his crew. He then asks the Vulkan security officer for more information. “Are we looking for anything in particular?”

The Vulkan replies with honest curiosity. “He does not appear to have taken anything of value, although we cannot discount the possibility of access to public computer systems. He spent most of his time at archaeological sites posing as a trader of ancient artifacts.”

The Tellarite captain of the Federation ship thinks about this for a moment. “This Romulan may be exactly who he says he is. Vulcan is the original Romulan homeworld. If there are Romulans who have sympathy for their past, artifacts would be valuable to them. They might pay for the dirt from the ground.”

The Vulkan guard discounts this theory. “That would be highly illogical.”

The Tellarite captain smiles. “Indeed! The system is illogical, but his place within it makes perfect sense.”

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The Romulan spy, whose name is certainly not Surek, looks over the cargo of pottery, stoneworks, and boxes of uninspected dirt that had been beamed out of the ground by the construction company’s earth-moving equipment.

A thin self-driving forklift lifts a box of dirt and carries it to a table that has an integrated scanner and transporter pad. The Romulan scans the box and looks at the result on a monitor. He sees something interesting, and manipulates the interface.

The transporter beams a rectangular cubeful of dirt onto an adjacent table. The Romulan brushes away the dirt and reveals a black jar. It is the same black jar from the temple, sealed with wax. He scans it. A display shows the scroll inside.

“This looks valuable,” the Romulan remarks to himself. He sets the jar on a shelf and returns to his work.

## Part 5: An Officer's Commission

The Romulan "archaeologist" stands before the Senate.

The leader of a minority party makes an issue out of opposing him. "You expect us to approve your commission only because your uncle leads the largest party in the Senate."

The aforementioned uncle, a pudgy white-haired Romulan, gives a smug response. "Yes. So?"

The opposition politician continues. "The concern, my dear friend, is that your nephew seems to be thoroughly unqualified for such a position. Captaining a merchant freighter is not the same as a command under the Romulan banner. If we gave commissions to every civilian space trader, we would run out of ships! We have many officers who have trained and served and who have submitted their applications through the normal process. Why should your nephew even be considered? Let alone be considered ahead of them."

The candidate has a ready answer. "I have heard that behind closed doors, there has been talk among certain Senators of beginning a new era of openness and increasing exploration and trade relationships with our neighbors." At the word 'openness', the questioner briefly expresses shock that someone had leaked a private conversation of his. The candidate continues. "My work as a merchant has brought me into contact with many alien races. Have you negotiated with a Klingon? They consider breaking your nose to be a sign of respect. A captain who has spent a lifetime patrolling from Romulus to Remus and back is not prepared for what is out there. I have seen what is out there and shared ale with it. You ask if I am ready for the task, which is a fair question, and I say that I have been doing it."

This well-delivered line earns a smile from the candidate's uncle and prepared applause from his party's delegates.

The opposition speaker recovers and goes on to the next question. "There are also serious concerns about your ability to maintain appropriate standards of discipline on a long journey, as you have not gone through officer training. The reports from some of your own crewmen, whose honor is unimpeachable, cast your leadership style as more than untraditional, but verging on incompetent. Words like 'reckless' and 'lackadaisical' were used, and if this is what they would say in a written report about their own commander, we can guess how bad things must have been on your ship."

The candidate smoothly attempts to defend himself against this serious accusation. "Speculation might be fun but it is not needed here. This is one area where I will admit to an untraditional leadership style. I directed my crew to be honest in their assessments of my leadership. I would not retaliate against their careers, no matter what they wrote, so long as it was honest. That *is* untraditional. Perhaps it should be a new tradition."

The candidate continues. "As you are aware, several of my crewmen were commissioned fleet staff participating in the civil partnership program. They were all highly competent, a credit to the Naval Academy, and I would recommend any of them, even the ones who savaged me. I needed their honest advice to identify my own weaknesses and strengthen myself so that I could capably represent the Romulan Republic. *Failing* to seek this advice would have been reckless and lackadaisical, and I feel that I made the correct decision, for myself and for the Republic, no matter what whispers and rumors people might choose to build out of relatively minor issues."

A second opposing politician rises to speak. "Speaking of whispers and rumors, I was wondering if you might be willing to discuss one of your written reports, the catalog of mythical space entities."

The candidate eagerly beams as his politically savvy uncle cringes. "Certainly! I find these subjects to be fascinating, even if they might be fantasy. Did you have an interest in any in particular?"

The opposing politician is eager to help the candidate make a fool of himself. "Could you tell us about the space squid of Brenar?"

The candidate happily explained. "The space squid of Brenar reported by Captain T'nille supposedly lived on small ice-water comets and solar energy. We sent a ship to the Brenar system to look for it and did not find it, and there have been no sightings of it since. That truly is all that there there is to say about it. If we encounter one I will analyse and report it, but I have no expectation that we would. Would you like to hear of anything else?"

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The candidate gives another requested explanation. "The Klipsi exist. I have traded with the Paukuak who trade with them. They are not an armada. In fact, their reputation for power is greatly exaggerated or else they would exert more power than they do. They are vassals to the Gorn and will fight for them as a mercenary fleet, which is where the armada reputation comes from."

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"The Q are described as being all-powerful like the gods of ancient legends. The stories say that they will force starship captains into scenarios that test our moral qualities. Personally, I don't believe they exist."

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"The Tholians are described in detail in Earth Federation records. They live in melting temperature environments and avoid what we consider livable worlds. We might travel the same sectors of space and never meet only because our interests are in different star systems. The mythical aspect to the Tholians is their reputed ability to trap a ship at one point in space, interfering with all known forms of acceleration. Again, the Earth Federation records describe this in multiple accounts, so we must assume that the Tholians have such a power."

The first opposition questioner pounces on what he believes to be a weakness. "You seem to have quite an interest in Earth Federation records."

"Ah, yes!" The candidate responds as if that was a compliment. "We can learn a lot about Earthling behaviors by studying their own reports." Then, only now recognizing that the question was an attack, he adds an explanation. "Somebody has to study our enemies."

The questioner presses the attack. "Do you really see them as our enemies? We have heard reports of you talking without end about the Earthlings with a great deal of admiration, the same way you talk about the space squid." Pre-planned laughter erupts from the opposing side of the Senate.

The candidate attempts to dismiss the accusation. "An exaggeration, to be sure."

The accuser continues. "Six years ago, at the meeting of a reading club at Dimorus, you spoke for half a day's length about one Earthling Admiral named Keerk."

“Kirk.” The candidate corrects the questioner. “And the session was three and a half hours, with breaks.”

“This Keerk is someone you admire?” The questioner intentionally mispronounces the name in an attempt to trigger a reaction.

The candidate is careful in his answer. “He was a fascinating subject to study. This Earth captain is devious; aggressive or passive as the situation demanded; respectful of the abilities of his crew; and most importantly, he kept detailed records that we could study. And in these records it seems like every week he encountered some strange unique entity that would end up in my report on space myths. He practically wrote a quarter of it himself. And he recorded in detail how he neutralized each threat. The reports seem absurd but the solutions have a logic to them. They would work if the threat were as he described. He was either a madman or a tactical genius, and the truth might be that he was both. These records hint at the wide variety of what might be out there in the unknown. If we are to enter a new period of openness and exploration, we must be ready to adapt our methods to such a variety of potential threats.”

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During a break in the Senate session, the two opposition politicians meet in a side room. They look over computer records for any useful information. The second of them to speak on the Senate floor is the first of the two to speak in this room. “I looked into the records of the other members of this 'reading club' that he was a part of. It is a quite a motley group of Naval officers and criminals. One of them is a smuggler. We caught him. Another is in jail for financial fraud.”

The first opposition politician smiles and nods. The first opposition Senator smiles and nods. “We can send that to the media.”

The second opposition Senator hesitates. “I might not be so hasty to draw further attention to this group. Some of the other attendees are highly regarded. One is the assistant dean of the specialized engineering school at Dimorus.”

The first opposition Senator's jaw drops open in shock. “The *specialized* engineering school?” He leans forward and whispers into his colleague's ear. “That is where we reverse-engineer alien weaponry!”

His colleague nods. “Yes, I was aware of that. Also, several of the civilian attendees were former cadets who had high marks at the Naval Academy before their careers ended abruptly for reasons that would normally merit a verbal reprimand. When was the last time you heard of anyone being expelled for having ale in his barracks during an inspection, with no prior demerits?”

The first Senator thinks about it. “So either they all ticked off the wrong officer, or...”

“Or...” continues the other Senator. “I looked into the continuing naval officers who attended the meeting. Several of them have recommendations in their files from Vice-Admiral Naved of the intelligence directorate.”

“Do you know what this means?” The first senator asks.

“It means that Tarvek might have qualifications that he is not allowed to disclose to the Senate.”

The first senator signs. “Well, yes, that. And, it means they let idiots into the Tal Shiar these days.” He shakes his head.

## Part 5: In Enemy Space

A Romulan warbird flies through space at warp speed. There is a bright flash of white light, and it is gone.

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“Captain to the bridge! Immediately!”

Captain Tarvek, the same Romulan “archaeologist” from before, walks into the bridge from his ready room wearing a loose robe and carrying a half-empty bottle of ale. The tactical officer greets him. “Sir! I took the liberty of declaring full alert!”

The unready captain takes the report without a word, then looks at the viewscreen. “What is a Gorn ship doing way out here?”

The navigator answers. “We are not 'out here' anymore, Captain. According to the stars, we seem to be deep in Gorn space.”

The captain blinks. “How? Did we hit a wormhole?”

The navigator answers in the negative. “I did not detect any anomalies. We jumped 120 light-years in one instant.”

The captain stands in disbelief. “Am I drunk or dreaming this?” He pinches his pointed ear and winces at the pain. “It seems real enough.” He watches the Gorn ship turn toward them. “Well, hail them before they start shooting at us!”

The navigator reaches for the controls. “Yes, sir!”

The Gorn captain soon appears on screen and speaks first. “The weak try to talk. I might enjoy hearing your explanation for why you have broken the treaty and violated our territory with your presence.”

The captain has no explanation nor excuse, so he provides the truth. “You will be disappointed. We encountered an anomaly of some sort. We still do not know what it was, but it transported us from Romulan space to this location. We will provide you with our navigation records--”

The Gorn captain interrupts him. “You were spying on us! Your cloak failed! Your excuse is so weak...” The Gorn seems to think for a moment. “Absurdly weak. I expected a Romulan spy to craft a better excuse than that. You should try to amuse me because your life does depend on it.”

There is a flash of bright light on the bridge of the Romulan ship as an aged Romulan admiral appears from nowhere. The Romulan captain looks at him incredulously, then feigns respect. “Ah, Admiral Naved! It is an honor to receive you! What brings you way out here, so far from your office at the Naval Command Center on Romulus?”

Admiral Naved does not pick up on the captain’s sarcasm at all. He speaks in a voice that is matter-of-fact and lacking emotion, giving off an air of maturity. “Your ship has been selected for a special mission. You are to engage and destroy the nearby Gorn vessel.”

The captain raises an eyebrow. “The Senate has affirmed a treaty of cease-fire with the Gorn. I am bound, as a Romulan, to follow the laws of the Senate.”

Naved replies calmly. “This is a secret mission approved by the Senate in secret.”

The Gorn captain, watching all of this, looks on incredulously.

The Romulan captain nods. “That may be the case, but we will need to confirm the orders. For the time being--” he turns to his tactical officer. “Reduce our alert status by one level.”

The disappointed Naved disappears in a flash of light.

On the Gorn bridge, an elder Gorn appears in a bright flash of light. This new Gorn addresses the Gorn captain and speaks angrily. “I am your clan father! This Romulan invader killed your brother! Slaughter him!”

One of the Gorn officers interjects. “He speaks some truth. That is the ship that destroyed the Obsidian Spur.”

The Gorn captain looks through the viewscreen at the Romulan captain with evident hatred in his eyes. He stands tall, turns to the 'clan father', and says “No.”

“Hrraugh!” The 'clan father' yells as the Gorn captain explodes in a gruesome shower of flesh.

The Romulan captain looks on in astonishment. “That seems to have been entirely unnecessary.”

The 'clan father' looks at the Romulan captain through the viewscreen, showing no emotion. He turns back to the mess and snaps his clawed fingers. There is a bright flash of light, and the Gorn captain stands where he was.

One of the Gorn bridge officers addresses him. “Captain! Are you well?”

The Gorn captain, unaware of what had happened, says, “Yes. Why do you ask?”

The Romulan captain talks. “Our guest seems insistent that we fight each other for some reason.”

The 'guest' disappears in a flash and reappears as 'Naved' on the Romulan bridge. He speaks to the captain in Naved's authoritative, emotionless voice. “Yes. You must fight the Gorn.”

“Must we?” The Romulan asks.

“Yes.” answers 'Naved'. “I insist upon it.”

The Romulan captain takes a deep breath before answering the impostor admiral. “We will need to contact the Senate recordkeeper for confirmation of the attack order. Such a sensitive order as this is likely not in any computer system, so we will need to speak to the recordkeeper in person, and he might not be in his office right now. It might take some time to find him.”

The false Naved turns to the Gorn on the viewscreen.

The Gorn captain gives his own excuse. "Our main cannon is undergoing scheduled maintenance. We will have to wait until it is ready."

The false Naved offers his help. "I can repair it for you." After a moment he adds a diagnosis. "It seems fine to me."

"That will not be necessary," the Gorn captain says.

"So fire it," 'Naved' says impatiently. "Fight him."

"That... is not necessary," the Gorn captain says.

'Naved' again appeals to the Romulan captain. "You fight him. The Gorn are your enemies."

The Romulan captain explains his refusal. "The war is over. We have an agreement."

'Naved' raises the stakes. "You will fight each other, or I will dash your ships across the nearest planet!" The two captains look at him with disbelief, but 'Naved' continues. "I can do it. I will give you until the count of five. One... two..."

The two captains look back and forth between 'Naved', each other, and their equally confused crews.

"Three..." 'Naved' continues counting.

The Romulan captain quickly speaks to his Gorn counterpart. "Could you prepare a gymnasium for single combat?"

'Naved' stops counting, and grins widely.

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The Romulan captain steps through a door to become the only Romulan in a room full of Gorn. The gymnasium's exercise equipment has been moved to the walls to make room for the padded mat that will be the battle arena. The Gorn captain stands on the mat, ready and waiting. The Romulan captain reluctantly steps up to meet him.

The false 'Naved' appears in the room in a flash of light. He smiles eagerly. "Fight!", he encourages the two combatants.

Neither captain is especially eager to fight. The Romulan knows that he will lose, and the Gorn knows that it is not a fair contest. The Gorn captain says as much to his Romulan counterpart. "Your people have strong minds, but your bodies are weak."

The Romulan captain speaks with as much confidence as he can muster. "I will fight to the best of my ability."

The Gorn captain offers the Romulan the first strike. "Then come at me!"

The two combatants cautiously circle each other for a short time before the Romulan rushes in and punches the Gorn in the gut. The Gorn picks up the Romulan and effortlessly drops him onto the mat.

The impostor of Admiral Naved smiles. "Do that again!"

The Gorn captain again picks up his Romulan counterpart and throws him to the mat. And again. And again. And again.

The false Naved gleefully looks on, until there is a flash of white light beside him. Now standing next to him is the goddess Ash-Tira wearing the uniform of a Romulan admiral.

"Q, what are you doing?" asks Ash-Tira.

The false Naved explains himself. "I wanted to see them fight, Q."

"Does it teach them anything?" asks Ash-Tira.

"No," admits the false Naved.

Ash-Tira looks at Naved with a sympathetic smile. "Child, let us stop bothering these poor creatures."

"Yes, mother."

The two Q disappear in flashes of light. The room of Gorn and the one Romulan can barely believe what they have witnessed, and they now see that there is no evidence.

Rising from the mat on one elbow, the Romulan captain starts to speak. "Well, that seems to be--"

Ash-Tira flashes into the room again and briefly addresses the Romulan captain. "If you are troubled by Q again, I believe that you know how to reach me." She flashes away before the perplexed captain can ask for an explanation. He has no idea what she was talking about.

The Gorn looks down at his opponent. "So you are the captain of the Romulan ship that killed my brother."

The Romulan captain looks around the room of Gorn, each of which is stronger than him. He sits, lacking the strength to stand. "That may be true," he admits.

The Gorn kneels to speak to the Romulan. "The war is over. Let it stay over."

---

The exhausted Romulan captain returns to his quarters to get back to his interrupted sleep. He climbs into his bed and issues a verbal order to the computer. "Lights off."

The room goes dark. It is not more than a few seconds before a thought strikes the Captain's mind, and he issues a different order. "Lights on." The lights return.

The Captain climbs out of bed and walks to the side of the room and kicks a low platform. A life-size holographic warrior emerges from the platform, wielding a longsword. The holographic warrior speaks. "Level 16. Longsword."

The captain speaks to the combat simulator. "Enter maintenance mode."

The holographic warrior disappears and a panel opens on the platform. The captain takes a reading device off a shelf, plugs a cable into the platform, and begins reading secret records that he had stored in the game's memory. He finds the file for the black jar and a translation of the scroll. "Is there meaning to this ancient gibberish? 'the swell below region'... subspace wave? In the bloody bronze age?"

He copies the file to another device, then turns on a communicator. "Captain to engineering. I have a side project for anyone willing to take it on..."

## Part 6: The Eagle and the Industrious

The Nebula-class ship USS Eagle advances on the Constitution-class USS Industrious that it has found parked near the remains of another Federation ship. The captain records the events in his log.

“Captain's Log. Two months ago, Starbase 14 reported a warp signature traveling from Gorn space at a steady Warp 3.6 without an identifying beacon, moving in the direction of Cardassia on the opposite side of Federation space with an estimated arrival time at the border of around now. Four days ago scanners began picking up signs of a vessel traveling near the Cardassian border with the mass and power profile very similar to that of an old Constitution-class ship. We have followed it to the the wreck of the USS Lucerne which was disabled and abandoned during the Cardassian war.”

On the Eagle’s bridge, the tactical officer gives his report. "We have visual. It certainly looks like a Constitution-class."

The captain speaks to him. "Scan them." He then speaks to Navigation. "Keep an eye on the Cardassians."

The navigation officer reports: "The Cardassians are holding steady on their side of the border."

The tactical officer also reports: "We are being scanned by the Constitution-class."

The captain shrugs this off. "Fair enough."

The tactical officer gives another report. “They have turned on their beacon. They claim to be the USS Industrious. The signature does check out, but the protocol is so old that it could easily be faked.”

The First Officer looks up information on her computer. “The last record of the USS Industrious lists it as missing and presumed lost in the Gorn war over one hundred years ago.”

Captain: “But here it is, still flying. Or an impostor.”

The First Officer speaks the question raised. “Who would impersonate a ship that was lost in the Gorn War? That would only heighten our suspicions.”

The captain raises an eyebrow and smiles. "Shall we find out? Hail them."

The navigation officer reports as he does so. "Hailing the Industrious."

The bridge of the Industrious appears on the main viewscreen. The crew of the Eagle is surprised to see that the Industrious is crewed by humans and Vulcans wearing uniforms that are over a hundred years out of date.

The captain of the Eagle speaks. “This is Captain James Harrington of the USS Eagle. I would like to speak with Captain Cindy LeFevre.”

The captain of the Industrious is surprised by the question. “This is Acting Captain Michael Okafor of the USS Industrious. Captain LeFevre died over a hundred years ago. I believe that sixteen of my crewmen are her descendants.”

Captain Harrington speaks a quiet aside to his Vulkan science officer. "Are they human?"

Acting Captain Okafor overhears this and answers with a smile. "We are human, Captain, and there are also thirty Vulcans at our colony. The Andorians of the crew died out, but we remember their names."

The Industrious bridge crew recite the names in well-practiced unison. "Second Lieutenant Telev Vorol, Engineering. Ensign Valen Rall, Botany. Ensign Kellen Laron, Security and Cargo."

Acting Captain Okafor continues. "We remember the Last Crew with honor. They were all our forefathers."

The Eagle's First Officer reads from a display and gives her findings to Captain Harrington. "Those are the names of Industrious crewmen, all Andorians."

Captain Harrington is fascinated. "So you are from a lost Federation colony. In Gorn space?"

Acting Captain Okafor smiles as he corrects Captain Harrington. "Beyond."

Captain Harrington continues with another question. "And you decided to return now? And... in secret."

Okafor gives an evasive answer to the question. "Our decisions have been guided by unusual circumstances."

Harrington's suspicions are raised, but he chooses to be diplomatic. "I would like to invite you to a welcoming celebration on board my ship. I am sure that you have great stories to tell."

Okafor smiles with gratitude. "I appreciate the invitation, but I will need to discuss this proposal with my officer staff."

Harrington ends the dialogue with a smile. "I look forward to hearing your response. It was a pleasure to meet you, Captain. Harrington out."

When the communication is over, the First Officer speaks with pleasure. "This is exciting. They are going to love this story back on Earth, even if no one is alive to remember the crew."

Captain Harrington is not so happy. "Yes, but something is still off about this."

The tactical officer has waited until the end of the communication to report a curious finding. "Sir, according to our scans there appear to be children hiding in the Jeffreys tubes on the Industrious."

The Vulkan science officer corrects the tactical officer. "On a ship of this age the maintenance pathways may not be of Jeffreys design."

Harrington looks at the tactical officer with skepticism. "Children, you say?"

The tactical officer gives his best explanation. "That is what they look like from here."

The science officer looks over the same readings: "Their biological signatures are distinctly less massive compared to the bridge crew. The computer cannot determine their species."

Captain Harrington makes a decision. "Find one that is isolated." He turns toward his first officer. "How about I handle the official diplomacy while you handle the unofficial diplomacy?"

---

In a transporter room aboard the Eagle, the first officer watches as they beam aboard a child-sized creature that looks kind of like a fairy with a lizard face. Two younger officers look at each other and do not say anything.

Carrying a toolbox in one hand and a tool in the other, the guest speaks to the Eagle's First Officer. "You must be the younger Lefevre girl. I was warned about your pranks, or did you need a plasma conduit fixed this badly?" He notices something unusual. "Your clothing seems different."

The First Officer is pleasantly amused at being called young. She smiles as she introduces herself. "I am Lieutenant-Commander Marion Riley. Welcome to the USS Eagle."

It takes a moment for the implications to sink in.

"... Oh."

---

While walking through one of the Eagle's circular hallway, Captain Harrington contacts his first officer through his communicator. "Harrington here. What did you you pick up?"

First Officer Riley responds. "It appears to be Stevens's species. He told us all about their intentions. They seem to be benign. I will send you a briefing."

Harrington politely demands more information. "I am not familiar with Stevens's species. What do they look like?"

Riley hesitates, "They look like..." She laughs. "I can't say it. They are almost certainly Amanda Stevens's species. From the Icarus report."

Harrington: "From the I..." He smiles a wide grin as he understands what she is saying. "... and I'm going to have to sit through a diplomatic meal before I can see this."

---

One of Starfleet Academy's main training centers is located in the Earth city of San Francisco. On clear days the windows of the upper floors provide a good view of the landmark Golden Gate bridge, which visitors are always surprised to learn is red and not gold.

In one of the academy's classrooms, an instructor speaks before a large class of young adults of varying species. "This week you will be seeing Solkar's dissertation on human anatomy. We know that only a few of you will be pursuing a career in medicine, but that is not the primary purpose of this session. That purpose is to gauge your ability to pay attention to details and remember them when you need to. You will be tested at the end of the week, so do not fall asleep during the show."

There is scattered laughter from the class.

The instructor continues. “I also encourage those of you who are from this planet, Earth, to acknowledge how you might be seen by outsiders. It is always a valuable skill to observe a situation from the perspective of another. Now let us begin.”

The Vulcan researcher Solkar appears as a hologram to begin his lengthy lecture. “The starfaring races were recently joined by the people of the planet whose inhabitants call it Earth or Terra. The Earth people, or Humans as they call themselves, are strikingly similar in appearance to ourselves. To an alien they might be mistaken for a breed of Vulcans with circular ears. A closer inspection will reveal a great number of differences, as it should.”

The lecture continues into the next hour. “Here we see the arrangement of the internal organs. The heart is centrally located in a high position, while a toxin filtering organ is present where one might expect the heart to be...”

The lecture continues into a third hour. “Human blood contains a high level of the element iron which is used to bind oxygen to the transportation cells. The interaction between iron and oxygen gives human blood a red color.”

The lecture continues into a second day. “The human nervous system has evolved in a similar manner to our own. The neuron shape is instantly recognizable to any student of biology, and the signaling mechanism is quite similar, with minor differences that will be explained in detail in hour fourteen.”

The lecture continues into a third day. “The nutrient-rich uterine lining of the mature female is periodically expelled and regenerated every twenty-eight Earth days to prevent infection.”

The lecture continues into a fourth day. “The number of assisting life forms in the human digestion system has varied in the samples we have examined between two hundred eighty nine and one thousand and forty one types. Of these, fifty-two life forms were common to all samples...”

The week ends, and so does the lecture. “With that, we conclude our examination of the people of planet Earth. For those who might be interested in an in-depth examination of human sociology, I highly recommend T'pol of Sarnek's translation of the works of a human professor named John Fisher of Earth's Oxford University who has recorded in fascinating detail...”

As the cadets leave the classroom, the instructor speaks to a teaching assistant. “Do you think Squadron 47 will continue the tradition this year?”

The assistant smiles. “If they don't, I'll send it.”

The students from the classroom take their meals in the academy's mess hall. Several of the students are surprised to receive a message at the same time. They examine their communicators and talk among themselves.

“You got it too?” “It's from...” “Who is Squadron 47?” “They are seniors.”

The message speaks. “This evening you will be watching a *human* dissertation on the anatomy of another sentient species. You will be expected to pay attention to details if you can find any because we

have not been able to. Do not fall asleep during the 14 seconds of video. Finally, if you ever encounter a new species, please make your reports better than this one."

They cadets watch a grainy video produced by an ancient communications system.

"This is Captain Amanda Stevens of the Icarus. We made it through the front of the shockwave with no problems and we have already made first contact with a species that lives inside the nova region. They're cute little guys. They look kinda like fairies with lizard faces. I am sending a probe back out of the nebula to broadcast this message so you know we made it. We have a lot of exploring to do, and I look forward to doing it. Captain Stevens out."

The students chuckle for a moment, and then return to their food.

An Andorian student asks a question of his neighbor. "What is a fairy?"

"It is a mythical earth creature," his human companion tells him.

The Andorian wishes to know more. "What does it look like?"

His friend takes a wider view of the situation. "I believe that lack of information is the joke."

"Oh." Understanding, the Andorian smiles.

---

The briefing room of the USS Eagle has been turned into a dining room. There the command staffs of the Eagle and Industrious conclude their dinner. Acting Captain Okafor speaks with gratitude. "This has been a tremendous honor and a luxury."

Captain Harrington smiles. "It has been an honor for us as well. I would be especially honored if Captain Bopla would be able to join us."

Okafor is stunned that Harrington knows that name. "I will need to discuss this proposal with my officer staff."

Soon, Captain Bopla leads a few fellow members of Stevens's species into the dining room where they are greeted by the Eagle and Industrious command staffs. The table has been freshly set with fish-based dishes for their diet. Bopla looks over the presentation and the crews with a combination of awe and confusion. Unlike the smooth-talking human captain, diplomacy is not among Bopla's talents. However, his words are honest. "It is... an honor, Captain Harrington."

Harrington smiles gently. "We are honored as well."

Near the end of a second meal, Captain Bopla speaks undiplomatically. "I am stunned by your generosity, but... nothing is ever given for free. I wish to know what your Federation desires of us."

Harrington has no demands, nor would the Federation. "We desire friendship," he tells the newfound alien. Captain Bopla is not convinced.

---

Captain Harrington continues speaking to Captain Bopla through the ship's corridors. "The Lucerne has already been picked clean by other scavengers. You are not going to find anything there." He is interrupted by the arrival of a medical officer with a cartload of boxed equipment. "This is medical technology for your human and Vulcan crew. If your uniforms are any indicator, whatever you have is probably a century out of date."

---

Captain Harrington continues speaking as the aliens are led into the transporter room. "We sent you navigation charts. We are close to the Cardassian border. If they see a Federation ship cross it, it could start a war."

Captain Bopla is grateful for this information. "Thank you, Captain Harrington."

The aliens step up onto the transporter pad and wait to be returned to their ship.

Captain Harrington makes a last-second decision. "Wait. One more thing. Tell your escorts that, ah, their cloaking devices do not work. We can see them."

---

From the Eagle's bridge, Captain Harrington and his crew watch the Industrious and its six uncloaked escorts turn away and go to warp.

Harrington speaks to his communications officer. "Inform the Cardassians that we have made contact with a new people. They call themselves the Klipsi, and they are benign."

The communications officer predicts the Cardassians' response. "They will have questions. How much information should I add?"

Harrington feels generous. "Give them the record of our meeting. There is nothing sensitive in that."

The communication officer adds the security recordings to the message, then delivers it. "Message sent."

Harrington leans back in his chair and smiles. "That was a pleasant first contact. Or, second contact, but it has been more than a hundred years since we have seen these people."

First Officer Riley is not as relaxed as the captain. "They may not be benign. We learned something during our extended conversation with their engineer friend. When the Klipsi feel threatened by something, they organize and destroy it."

Harrington is not concerned. "That sounds like the history of humanity."

Had Harrington been present during that conversation, he might have been more concerned. Riley remembered what the Klipsi engineer had said, and how casually he had said it.

---

"We are conquerors. The sharks of the seas threatened us before we had a written history. We hunted them down and exterminated them. We know them only from fossils and legends. Our legends made us fear the land. We came out from the ocean and conquered the land. Our legends made us fear the sky.

We conquered the sky and traveled beyond the Purple. The Gorn attacked us. We fought them to a ceasefire, but," he smirks, "we burned them badly. When something is a threat to us, we organize and destroy it, and we expect no less from other peoples."

---

The First Officer's reverie is interrupted by a report from the communications officer. "Captain, Gul Tarkad sends a note of appreciation and expresses his hopes for a future era of friendship and cooperation between Cardassia and the Federation."

Captain Harrington grins. "I hope he doesn't get into trouble for that."

The navigation officer reports. "The Cardassians are departing from the border... at warp 3 and increasing."

Captain Harrington looks around at his bridge crew with a large smile on his face. "I consider this a very successful day, and I have a report to make to Starfleet. Riley, you have the bridge."

## Part 7: Search for the Golden Star

“Captain's log, supplemental. We have suffered severe damage in an attack by an unidentified alien vessel. More than twenty of my crewmen are dead. Another fourteen are in the infirmary. The enemy is powerful beyond our imagining, and hostile. All of my attempts at diplomacy have failed. We are uploading all of the data we have collected on the attackers. Inside this shuttle we have placed some scraps from their ship and stasis pods containing the bodies of four of the enemy and two of our injured crewmen whose wounds and the poison in their bodies may shed some light on who our attackers are.”

The Romulan captain Tarvek carries a Cardassian rifle through the busy shuttle bay of his ship. He is also equipped with a sword and a Federation phaser in addition to the standard Romulan disrupter on his belt.

The Romulan captain addresses an officer. "Lieutenant, finish preparing the shuttle, plot its course as we discussed earlier, and launch it when ready." The captain then turns toward the back of the shuttle bay where 40 uniformed Romulans are lined up. The Captain speaks to the assembly.

“My men and women. You were interrupted by the disturbances during this shift and you will not be getting back to sleep any time soon. Whatever rumours you might have heard, the truth is worse. We are no longer searching for a lost ship. Our mission now is to gather information about the enemy that attacked us. We are moving to two-shift days. For the purpose of record-keeping only, your shift will technically begin in a quarter day, but you are to begin working in your posts immediately and you will place yourselves under the command of whoever has survived the previous shift, no matter what their rank is, no matter what your rank is. Experience is more important. Any of you who are assigned to non-operational or non-scientific roles, including all security officers, will report to the station that you think you might best assist, even if all you can do is stir their stimulants. Our primary needs are in engineering, microengineering, tactics, and material science. You will also, at your next meal time, report to the starboard armory where you will be issued a modified disruptor that should be more effective against the enemy should they board this ship again. I cannot overstate the need for you all to give us your best effort to prepare us for our next engagement with the enemy. The enemy ship that attacked us... was a shuttlecraft.”

The captain waits for the surprise to sink in, then continues. “Go to your posts. Wait. One more thing. Before you report in, you may also go to medical to pay your last respects to those who did not survive the fighting. That is where I am going.”

One of the crew asks a question. “Sir, is there list of casualties?”

The captain frowns. “We are still compiling the names, but if somebody is not at their station, you can assume they did not make it. You are dismissed.”

There were no more questions.

After watching his crew depart, the captain walks over to a pile of things that have been retrieved from outer space. Several of the objects are from his blown-out ready room. He grabs a bottle of blue ale and opens it. "Protocol is dead."

---

The main viewscreen of the Romulan warship shows a larger Romulan warship. It had once been a D'Direx class, but it has been heavily modified.

A crewman reports. "The ship is putting out a Romulan signature. It is distorted, but it claims to be the Golden Star."

"It used to be the Golden Star," says another crewman.

The captain adds his opinion. "So this is the end result of what they tried to do to this ship."

"They are hailing us," reports the first crewman.

"On screen."

On screen is a former Romulan with cybernetic enhancements. He speaks immediately. "This is Scrutoris of Borg. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to the collective. You will adapt to serve the Collective."

The captain replies. "Admiral... you're not Admiral T'lias anymore. Scrutoris, you already have one of our ships, one of our foremost officers, and his entire crew. Is that not enough to assimilate Romulan distinctiveness into your collective?"

Scrutoris dismisses the captain's argument. "Debate is meaningless. You will surrender and await assimilation. Resistance is futile and will be met with your destruction."

As the Borg speaks, the captain mutes the conversation and speaks to his crew. "Plan one."

The rear half of the Golden Star collapses inward as the black hole powering the ship breaks containment.

"It's working!" One of the crewmen announces.

The captain is impatient. "It's mostly working. Fire."

Repeated attacks from the Romulan frigate blast apart the remaining intact parts of the Borg ship. The captain announces the victory to the crew. "Captain to all hands. We have destroyed an enemy ship and will be recovering components for further study. Do not allow this research to distract from our primary tactical objectives. I want our cloak operational as soon as possible."

---

The warbird hovers inside the atmosphere of a gas giant. On screen the crew sees a Borg sphere entering through the clouds.

"How is the cloak holding up?" the captain asks.

A technician answers. "I would assume it is working until they approach us. I would not even run a diagnostic on it since it could show a power spike."

"Good thinking." The captain returns his attention to the viewscreen. "It looks like they are going for the bait."

The sphere approaches a shuttlecraft that is immersed in a liquid layer of the gas giant. A probe floats deeper in the liquid below the shuttle.

"Ready... Ready..."

The sphere fires a beam which begins to cut into the liquid towards the shuttle.

"Now!"

There are three simultaneous flashes as both the shuttle and the cloaked Romulan ship go to warp from inside the gas giant and the probe explodes. Outside the gas giant, the Romulan ship turns out of the ball of atmosphere at the tail end of a streak of gas that the ship's warp bubble dragged with it.

The captain is pleased. "Well, we're still alive. Head us back in there."

"Already in progress," says the navigator.

A report comes in. "This is engineering. Warp drive is out for the foreseeable future, and needless to say we won't have a cloak."

The captain expected this. "As long as we have shields and weapons."

The engineer speaks. "They appear to be operational."

The captain sends a message. "Science, once we get in there, relay to tactical any locations that have powered up on the unsubmerged part of the alien vessel. That will be their antigravity."

The Romulan ship swoops into the atmosphere as the Borg ship begins to lift itself out of the liquid against a whirlpool dragging it down, caused by a miniature black hole. The Romulan ship fires a unique energy beam into the liquid surrounding the sphere. Lightning sparks throughout the liquid, and the sphere sinks.

"Fire at will."

It takes all of the firepower that the ship has to break through the Borg sphere's defenses, causing a small explosion. The Borg ship fires back with beam cannons, hitting twice.

The tactical officer reports. "We got one of them. Shields are holding at two-thirds."

The science officer reports. "The singularity will hold for another three minutes."

The navigational officer reports. "I am swinging us around for another pass. It's hard to hold us up in this gravity. We almost hit the water ourselves."

The captain begins pushing buttons. "I am rerouting starboard shield power to the auxiliary cannon. Lieutenant, forward me your target list and your target of choice."

The tactical officer looks at his screen which is marked 'Secret' in several places. "Captain, now would be a good time to brief me on the auxiliary cannon."

The captain smiles. "You shall see."

The Romulan ship concentrates its weapons at a single spot on the sphere as before. At the same time, a non-standard device on the ship's starboard wing fires three unmistakable photon torpedoes which strike three other parts of the sphere, blowing large chunks out of it. The damaged parts of the sphere begin to sink into the liquid as the sphere rolls so that its undamaged antigravity devices are at the top.

The tactical officer is amazed. "What in the name of Ashtira was that?"

The captain explains with a hint of embarrassment. "It is a Earth Federation weapon that I acquired during my time as a free merchant."

"Ah, so the rumours are true!" The tactical officer teases the captain.

The captain slumps in his chair and changes the subject to more immediate matters. "That's an untouched hull breach going under. Use the Tau beam again and concentrate disruptor fire on the topmost antigravs."

The Romulan ship fires the same energy beam into liquid, causing the same lightning effect. It then fires disruptors and torpedoes at the Borg ship. The photon torpedoes do less damage this time as the Borg have adapted to the new weapon, but the disruptors do more damage with each hit.

The tactical officer is pleasantly surprised. "We're doing more damage. Are their defenses down?"

The captain grins maliciously. "They're putting everything they have into staying afloat. Hover and hit them with everything we have."

The Romulan ship fires into the top of the sphere. At the tactical officer's discretion, it also fires several shots into the sphere near the waterline.

"Sink, you bastards. Sink."

The top of the sphere falls below the liquid. Below the surface, the bottom of the sphere begins to shred as it falls into the hold of the miniature black hole left by the probe's explosion.

The Captain turns to the science officer. "They should be flooded. Should we Tau them again to finish them off?"

The science officer has another suggestion. "I suggest we reverse the polarity on the Tau beam. It will be less effective but it would reduce the possibility that they could use the leftover charge in the liquid as a power source."

The captain agrees. "And they've probably figured out a way to neutralize the beam by now. Do it."

The surface of the water crackles and is then still. The sphere appears to shrink as it sinks into the depths.

“Let's stay here and make sure they stay down there.”

The navigation officer reports a problem. “Our power will last for six minutes before we will have to move to a stable orbit.”

The tactical officer offers a solution. “We can take main weapons offline.”

“That gives us just under two hours.”

Another crewman reports in. “Crewman Dalshon, on the shuttle, is requesting permission to reboard the ship.”

“Tell him he'll have to wait a couple of hours. While he's up there, tell him to keep his passive scanners active and his active systems at minimal power.” The captain watches the sphere sink for a few seconds. Satisfied, he turns to his tactical officer to settle an issue that had come up earlier. “About those rumours, Lieutenant”

The lieutenant beamed. “I have never been more pleased or honored than to serve under an Earth-loving traitor.”

The captain ignored the muffled laughter from the science officer. “Lieutenant, when we are done here you will personally assist me in emptying a bottle of 1470 House of T'lani, and that is a direct order.”

“Yes, sir!”

“The rest of my stockpile is open to anyone who is off duty. Everything we've been able to recover is in Cargo Room One off the shuttle bay. There is no use in collecting it if we're not going to drink it.”

---

The imposing image of a Borg cube covers the entire viewscreen.

“Un-magnify.”

The cube shrinks to a point where its edges are visible.

The science officer reports something interesting. “Parts of the ship's hull have elemental subsignatures matching the star systems of several of the evacuated colonies in the Neutral Zone. The ship is incorporating the material from the colonies into its body.”

The captain considers the implications. “This is the mother ship. We have to win here. Proceed with our plans.”

“Which plan?” the science officer asks.

“All of them.”

The navigation officer makes note of the obvious problem with that order. "Including the last one?"

"If we need to. Computer, beam Lieutenant Suvin to the shuttle bay in five seconds. You know your duties."

The officer nods and disappears in a beam of light.

"Captain to all hands. We are moving in fifteen seconds." He then speaks to one of his officers. "Hail them. Let's be rude."

The image of a Borg appears on screen.

"Identify yourselves," the Captain demands.

"We are Borg. Your unique identity will be assimilated into the --"

The captain pushes a button.

The Borg cube begins to collapse from the inside out as the Romulan ship uses the last of its singularities.

Inside the Borg ship, a Romulan strike team beams in. One of the Romulans raises a severed Borg head into the nearest regeneration chamber while another furiously taps on a communications device that he holds up to the head as the others stand guard. Elsewhere, another strike team beams in with a 4-foot tall black cylinder. One of the team members opens a panel on the cylinder and begins pushing buttons.

Three explosions burst out of the cube while the collapse continues and large sections of the cube began to lose their lighting. While this happens, the cube is also taking disruptor and torpedo fire from the Romulan ship, the Romulan weapons doing little damage but the unexpected photon torpedoes blasting large holes in it.

The tactical officer reports. "We fired the last of your special missiles. I am disabling power to the auxiliary cannon."

The science officer reports. "They have adapted to all four of our logic attacks."

As power returns to one of the front corners of the cube, a Borg beam weapon begins firing.

The tactical officer reports a hard hit. "Shields are down to forty-eight percent!"

Captain: "Protect the main systems. Everything else can be sacrificed."

"We're already doing that," the tactical officer reports.

The captain pushes a button on his armrest. "Captain to Cargo Bay 2. Reliquary. Activate the Ashtira caller."

A voice responds. "We did that when we encountered the sphere. We've been following the procedures but we have had no response from her."

“Route my message through it. The captain stands, watches the cube repair its damage on his viewscreen, and speaks. “Ashtira? Q? We need you.”

Nothing happens. The captain talks to his helm officer. "Navigation, prepare for maximum warp. Aim for the biggest hole."

The science officer interrupts. “I suggest warp 4.937 for the most effective resonance shock.”

“Do it.”

The navigation officer pauses for a moment to observe the Borg ship repairing itself on screen. Then the officer pushes a button.

Time stands still as the front of the Romulan ship's warp bubble tears into the Borg cube, while a shuttlecraft warps away in the opposite direction.

A woman's voice speaks. "How pathetic."

There is the sound of snapping fingers. Both the Romulan and Borg ships vanish in a flash of light.

---

On the Klingon home world, the High Council meets to hear a report from the leader of the Klingon strike force advancing on Earth.

Chancellor K'mpec speaks first. “Admiral Fodor, the council is ready to hear your initial report.”

Councilor Duras speaks to be heard. “Yes, we look forward to hearing what actions you have taken to retaliate for the treachery of the Federation and their destruction of our entire forward battle fleet.”

On a viewscreen, from many tens of light years away, Admiral Fodor speaks. “We have determined that there was no treachery. The warriors of the Federation fought and died with honor alongside our brave warriors. I recommend that we give high honors to the Federation.”

The chancellor considers this. “If this is true... I trust you, Admiral. You are a man of honor, and I look forward to your detailed report.”

The admiral nervously speaks. “You would not look forward to it if you had seen it, but you must see it. I will be sending it shortly.”

The High Council watches fuzzy footage of the battle of Wolf 359. The Federation ships are already destroyed by the time the Klingons get there.

One of the council members is outraged by what he sees. “Our weapons are not even scratching it! They... they fight without honor!”

Two council members' aides enter to pass a message. One of them looks at the viewscreen with awe, fear, and recognition. The other aide quietly whispers in his councilor's ear. "Sir, your first wife wants you to know that..."

The shocked aide dares to speak to the council without asking for recognition. "Is that a cube ship?" He watches it effortlessly destroy a Klingon ship. "My Chancellor, if I may speak, there is a man in the prisons who you need to speak to."

The aide leads his councilman, the chancellor, and two other councilmen through a prison. The prison door opens. The chancellor walks inside, grabs the Romulan prisoner, Lieutenant Suvin, and screams at him.

"WHO ARE THEY??? WHAT ARE THEY!?"

## Part 8: Strike On Alpha

An advancing Borg cube scatters a Romulan fleet ahead of its path. The Romulan ships evade rather than press an attack, attempting to distribute the Borg firepower across different ships.

The Romulan flagship shakes as it takes a hit. "Shields are at fifty percent!" reports an officer.

"Reinforcements?" the Romulan admiral asks his crew.

A crewman looks at a screen showing Romulan, Federation, and Gorn symbols with arrows pointing towards their position. "Twelve minutes!"

"We have to last. If we are still here to combine fleets, we can win."

A Bird of Prey takes a hit that knocks it out of warp. As it falls behind, the Borg cube's side and rear armaments strike and tear it to pieces.

A crewman reports to the admiral. "The Gorn fleet is splitting in two. The faster ships are advancing as if to attack."

The admiral is upset by the Gorns' choice. "They are attacking too early! They are only wasting their lives."

The ships that advance ahead are not Gorn. The Borg observe them, and then they receive a message from one of them.

"This is Klipsi battle fleet seven. We have a great deal of distinctiveness for you to assimilate."

The viewscreen of the Borg ship abruptly shuts off to show the Klipsi ships sending a hail of photon torpedoes.

The Klipsi ships are wedge-shaped with four nacelles. The wingtip nacelles detach and launch themselves into the cube at warp speed, scouring its nearest face. The cube rotates and returns fire from an undamaged face, tearing the Klipsi apart. As some of the Klipsi ships are sliced in half by a beam weapon, the two halves recover and bear down on the cube, to be destroyed by subsequent attacks.

After wiping out the Klipsi assault, the Borg cube rotates and fires volleys from three undamaged sides into deep space, targeting a Federation task force that arrives at full warp. The Federation ships take severe damage.

On the bridge of the Romulan flagship, an officer reports. "It seems they really don't care for the Earthlings."

The admiral responds. "Yes, the Earthlings have defeated them twice already. Send a message to all ships. We attack now while they are distracted."

A bridge officer warns him. "Sir, the Home Fleet is still an hour away."

The admiral frowns. "We will not last an hour."

The Romulan ships swing out, regroup into attack wings, and swoop back in to attack. The Borg deal heavy damage to several of them, including the flagship.

The admiral calls out to his crew. "Do we still have our starboard disruptor?"

A bridge officer replies. "Yes, but it's not going to do much good."

The admiral tells his crew to use it anyway. "It will be enough to distract their fire away from ships that do have working weapons. Get portside shields back up!"

The damaged flagship and its remaining squadron turn around for another run on the heavily damaged cube. Behind them, they are joined by seventy decloaking Romulan warbirds, fast attack ships that could outrun the slower ships in the Home Fleet. The Home Fleet had sent its faster ships ahead with instructions to wait for the most opportune moment to strike and had kept the plan secret from the advance fleet to prevent the Borg from listening in.

The warbirds with fresh weapons and battle systems do a fair amount of damage to the cube, and much additional damage is done by the twenty-four Romulan-built Defiant-class ships that follow in behind them. The circumstances are so dire that the Romulans do not mind letting the Federation know that they stole the Defiant's design.

So much has material been blown away from the Borg ship that it no longer is a cube, yet it keeps fighting and repairing itself. Blue-tinted fire from boxy ships announces the arrival of the Gorn.

A severely damaged Federation ship, missing half of its saucer section, draws alongside what is left of the cube and meekly fires its dorsal phaser into the Borg ship, causing a small explosion. The Borg respond by shredding its surface with hastily constructed weapons that are not powerful enough to destroy it. The Federation ship rotates and fires its ventral phaser into the Borg before it is fully incapacitated.

The mix of Romulan, Federation, and Gorn ships descend on the weakening Borg ship.

---

A Romulan search party waves flashlights around the damaged bridge of a Federation ship. Debris is everywhere.

A Romulan examines the limp navigation officer and gives his report. "Plasma burns from an overloaded conduit. Concussive shock, probably from a fluctuating inertial dampener. He'll live."

Another Romulan examines another body. "Concussive shock seems to be the story here."

The leader of the search party speaks through a communicator. "Find an Earthling medical officer and request neurostimulators for their survivors." He puts the communicator away and looks down to see a red-shirted officer face-down on the floor. The officer grunts and shifts slightly. The Romulan kneels and puts his hand on the officer's shoulder.

Romulan: "Congratulations, Captain. We won."

Captain William Riker turns his head to look up. He blinks several times. Imagining his rescuer to be a Vulcan, he attempts to raise a hand and fails to open his fingers. "Live long and prosper." He then collapses.

The Romulan nods. "No offense taken."

---

The ship's medical officer shines a light into Captain Riker's eyes. A crewman walks into the medical bay to speak to him. "Captain! The reports have come in. The Borg attack was a complete wipe!"

"Us or them?" Riker asks. He turns his head and sees that his crewman is smiling, so he returns the smile.

"All eight cubes were destroyed," the crewman reports happily.

The medical officer lightly pinches Captain Riker's jaw as a hint to turn his head forward. "Captain..."

The captain faces forward again so that the medical officer can continue examining his eyes. He speaks his mind. "I am glad that we have shared everything we knew about the Borg with everybody. If I can get a clean bill of health, there will be a victory party to attend."

---

The nearest victory party is hosted on a Romulan ship. Captain Riker is among the group of Federation guests who nervously enter a roomful of notoriously treacherous Romulans with a few notoriously hostile Gorn. The Romulans' smiles are genuine, but the Federation men are guarded.

A Romulan admiral greets a human Federation admiral. "Welcome! Our chefs have prepared several traditional dishes from the Federation worlds."

Wary of poison, the Federation admiral declines the offer as politely as he can. "It is an honor, and I am honored, but my men and I ate before we came."

The Romulan admiral understands fully, and he attempts not to appear offended. He simply smiles and nods.

The Federation admiral takes another look at the meal table. "Did you put sour cream and bacon in the macaroni and cheese?"

The Romulan admiral is unsure if his Federation counterpart is offended by the additions. "Yes. It was the recipe that our men found in their research."

The Federation admiral smiles. "Perhaps I will take some back to the ship to try later."

Riker speaks to a Gorn captain who has finished dinner and seems bored. "We thank you for your assistance. I am William Riker of the Federation, captain of the Runnymede." He offers his hand for a shake.

The Gorn is aware of this Earth custom, and takes the hand in his own. "Tor of Esseth Three."

“Did the Borg threaten the Gorn with this wave of attacks?” Captain Riker asks.

“The Borg threaten everyone,” says the Gorn. “They attacked Tholia. We helped.”

Captain Riker smiles and nods. “Then the Tholians must be grateful for your help as well.”

The Federation admiral has a similar conversation with his Romulan counterpart. “To our surprise, the Borg did not attack Earth this time. They went after Tellar and Betazed. We assume that they were after Tellar’s technology and the unique Betazed biology.”

The doors again open as two guests enter the room, with a Romulan guard guiding them. They are Klipsi, Stevens’s Species.

The Romulan admiral smiles at their appearance. “Ah. There were survivors.” He speaks to his Federation counterpart. “Their ships are compartmentalized with redundant systems in each section, and sections of the hull are weak on purpose so that high pressures are expelled outward rather than inward through the ship. Half of the ship can be destroyed, and the other half will keep fighting.” The Romulan raises his drink of blue Romulan ale to his lips.

---

Back on his ship, Captain Riker seeks another opinion from his medical officer. The medical officer reads the results of scanning a gifted bottle of blue Romulan ale. “We detect no contaminants.”

“None?” Riker asks for confirmation.

The medical officer repeats her diagnosis. “No poisons. No unusual protein structures. Nothing that would not already be in any bottle that they pulled off the help.”

Riker wants to be absolutely certain. “Thank you for looking.”

---

Captain Riker relaxes in his ready room with a glass of Romulan ale in his hand. The man that he is talking to, over a distance of many light years, lectures him. “Captain Riker, you know better than to drink a gift from the Romulans.”

Riker smiles. “Everything we do in life is a risk, and I had my medical staff thoroughly scan it. They saw no problems.”

Admiral Jean-Luc Picard smiles and continues the conversation. “Now is this a courtesy call, do you want to talk for old times’ sake, or do you have information for Starfleet?”

“All three,” Riker says.

Admiral Picard chuckles. “Critical information first, then let us talk. It has been a while.”

## Part 9: The Xenophon

Captain Riker's ship, the USS Runnymede, is an Akira-class. Heavy damage from the battle with the Borg can be seen as the ship flies through space.

"Captian's Log, Stardate 63041.5. The Runnymede has not had the time to port for repairs before we were assigned a new mission. A group of Maquis rebels is causing trouble along the Cardassian border. They have captured a small Federation ship, the Xenophon, and are holding the crew hostage."

The Xenophon appears on the main viewscreen. It is an Oberth class, an odd-looking design with the saucer section placed between the two warp nacelles. The smaller Oberth turns to face the Runnymede.

Riker's tactical officer gives his assessment. "Even with our battle damage, an Oberth is no threat to us."

"Hail them," Riker commands.

The two leaders of the Maquis rebels appear on the viewscreen. They speak before Riker does.

"We had no choice to take drastic action," explains the first rebel.

"You have no idea what the Cardassians are doing to us!" exclaims the second.

Riker responds with a frown. "I don't want to hear it. I don't have the patience for this. We just fought the Borg. You will release the crew, you will return the ship, and you will go home. I will give you a temporary amnesty, and if the Federation chooses to press charges, someone will contact you later."

The two rebels turn toward each other. The second of them is on the verge of crying. "Go home, he says." The first rebel turns to the viewscreen, scowls, and turns off the communication.

Riker's tactical officer reports. "Sir, they are powering up their warp engines. They are pointed right at us."

Riker quickly speaks to his navigation officer. "Prepare a course—" He is interrupted by the sight of the Xenophon exploding under phaser fire from his own ship. With a shocked face, he turns to his tactical officer.

The nervous tactical officer explains his action. "Sir... you said that if they were going to ram us..."

---

In a dining hall, Admiral Picard shares tea with a lady admiral of similar age. Admiral Picard speaks of the current troubles. "While it is a miracle to survive any attack by the Borg, Starfleet has suffered severe losses. Between this and the Dominion war..."

The lady admiral has a more optimistic outlook. "While we may not be able to project force for the foreseeable future, we can project hope."

This thought brings a smile to Admiral Picard's face.

Soon the two have nearly finished their tea. The lady admiral checks the time and swallows down the last of her drink.

“Do you have somewhere to be?” asks Jean-Luc Picard.

“I have a... meeting to attend,” the lady admiral says evasively.

“What is the subject?” Admiral Picard asks curiously.

The lady admiral stops to plan out her answer. “I was advised not to tell you.”

Picard frowns, and then gives a half-smile. “You are one of the judges in Captain Riker’s court-martial.”

The lady admiral gives an embarrassed smile, and she repeats herself. “I was advised not to tell you.”

Admiral Picard sighs and leans back in his chair. “I shall recuse myself from offering any advice, and enjoy the rest of my tea.”

---

Captain Riker and his tactical officer nervously walk into a sparsely decorated room of only tables, chairs, and small lights embedded in the walls. Riker suppresses his emotions. The tactical officer does not.

Three admirals are already seated. One of them is the woman who had shared tea with Admiral Picard that afternoon.

The lead judge speaks. “Lieutenant Andrew Tomlinson and Captain William Riker. You are accused of malicious incompetence in the willful destruction of the Federation starship Xenophon, resulting in the deaths of 64 Federation crewmen and 23 civilians.”

Riker places his hand on his Lieutenant’s wrist and quietly gives him some advice. “Don’t say anything.” He then speaks to the admirals. “Lieutenant Tomlinson was following my order.”

---

Riker and Tomlinson are held in separate rooms overnight. Tomlinson tries to rest on the bed, but is unable to. He rolls to one side, then to the other.

Riker looks at himself in the mirror of the washroom. He combs his hair, examines it, and combs it again. He picks up a beard trimmer, adjusts its length setting, and raises it towards his chin. He has a second thought. He reduces the trimmer’s length setting, then raises it again. He stops himself. “No.”

Riker places the beard trimmer down on the sink and walks out of the room.

---

Riker and Tomlinson return to the courtroom for the last day of the trial. The lead judge speaks. “After reviewing the evidence, we have come to a conclusion. Lieutenant Andrew Tomlinson. We find you... not guilty of any crime.”

Lieutenant Tomlinson drops his head into his hands. His body shakes as he cries tears of joy and relief.

The lead judge continues. "Captain William Riker. We find you... not guilty of any crime."

Captain Riker nods respectfully. "Thank you, Admiral." He stands up and gives Lieutenant Tomlinson a comforting pat on the shoulder.

The lead judge continues. "You are both reminded that you are responsible for the deaths of nearly a hundred innocent lives."

Riker and Tomlinson both nod in understanding.

The lead judge finishes his statement. "With that said, you are free to go. This court is concluded." The judges stand and step down away from their chairs.

Riker speaks to Tomlinson. "The Runnymede will be in repairs for a while, so we are on shore leave for the foreseeable future. If you have nothing planned... a former captain of mine made Admiral, and he should be in town. Maybe you would like to meet him."

The lady admiral, who had tea with that admiral earlier in the day, pauses to speak to Tomlinson. "We saw the records from the Xenophon. If you had not fired, it would have been six hundred." She walks away and out of the room.

Riker gives the Lieutenant another pat on the shoulder.

---

Riker slowly walks through the courtyard of a Starfleet campus, taking in the sighs of a well-maintained garden. A man slowly approaches him and draws a phasor. He aims at Riker and pushes the trigger. The phaser does not fire. He pushes the trigger again, to no result. He stops to examine the phaser to see if he can find anything wrong with it. Riker is unaware until a Starfleet security guard runs past him.

Two Starfleet security guards grab the assassin's arms and drag him to the ground. A third stops to speak to Riker. "We tracked a relative of the Xenophon crew into the city and turned on the suppressors in case something like this would happen."

Riker is shocked that a relative of a Starfleet officer would stoop to personal revenge. "He is Starfleet? What is happening to the Federation?"

## Part 10: No Time To Rest

A Starfleet admiral sighs to another. "The way things are going, we may end up with more admirals than ships."

"I do not believe that your numbers are accurate," interjects a third admiral of the Vulkan race.

The second admiral explains the figure of speech to the logical Vulkan. "I believe that was a typical human exaggeration to emphasize the importance of the situation."

"Starfleet is at less than half strength," an admiral loudly reports to the others in the assembly. "If we cannot produce more starships, we will lose star systems to... anybody who chooses to take them." He pauses his speech when a small delegation of three Klipsi enters the room. He gestures towards with with a grateful smile. "Welcome to our Klipsi friends from the other side of Gorn space. They have provided advance warning of Borg movements by sending scouts into their transwarp conduits. It is a very dangerous job."

One of the Klipsi gives a disturbing report. "The Borg are not finished."

The Klipsi representative is soon given the floor, and a chair to stand on so that he can be seen behind the podium. He gives a presentation. "The Borg are preparing another deployment of eight assimilation cubes. They are under construction, but nearly complete and the Borg are quick builders. Given the observed movements of their scouts, we believe that they intend to attack several currently unknown targets in the Beta Quadrant."

"So it is not our problem," mumbles one admiral to his neighbors.

One of that admirals' neighbors disagrees. "It will become our problem if the Borg expand into the Beta Quadrant. They can use its resources to attack us."

The Klipsi continues. "With our knowledge of the Borg transwarp network, we can map out their most likely route of attack and send a fleet to intercept."

A Starfleet admiral is doubtful. "To intercept... eight Borg cubes at once. We can barely take down one."

The Klipsi's mind is focused on the mission's success, not its difficulty. He answers with a minimum of thought. "We will need eight times the firepower and resilience. Preferably more."

An admiral in the back sighs. "We do not have that many ships."

The Klipsi continues his presentation. "We have mapped out a transwarp route from Federation space to the Beta Quadrant and several potential intercept points. If an entire warfleet could be adapted to travel through the transwarp conduits, which requires specialized equipment, the overall travel time will be just under a thousand stardates."

The Starfleet admirals are now skeptical of the Klipsi's proposal. "That is almost a year," one says.

The mission-focused Klipsi refuses to see this as a drawback. “That is why we should adapt our warships for transwarp travel now. We must build our war fleet before the Borg are finished building theirs.”

“Must we?” asks a Starfleet admiral.

The Klipsi gives him an incredulous stare. “The Borg must be destroyed.”

---

A sly, long-haired man appears on the screen of a handheld datapad. He happily greets the pad’s owner. “Admiral Picard! I am glad I could reach you.”

Admiral Picard feigns a smile. “Trademaster Zendrik. As I have told you many times, Starfleet does not trade. We allocate resources to those in need, and those with the means to acquire these resources on their own are the least in need.”

Zendrik was not here to trade. He had something else to discuss. “Admiral, it has come to my attention that there are plans in motion for a large scale campaign against the Borg.”

Admiral Picard refuses to speak of it. “I cannot say if there are or are not any such plans against the Borg or any other race. For one thing, they might be listening in.”

Zendrik smiles through this dismissive refusal. “Admiral, the reason that have I contacted you is that many of my men have volunteered their ships to the fight. We’ve read the lists of losses. We know that you need anything that is able to fly, and we are willing to help.”

Admiral Picard takes a deep breath, smiles, and replies after a moment’s thought. “If we do campaign against the Borg, your ships may not be strong enough to contribute, and you will be gone for two years if you come back at all. Tell your men that the best thing for them to do is stay behind and help the remainder of Starfleet keep the peace while the rest of the fleet is away.”

---

Two Starfleet admirals discuss the recruitment effort. “The Klingons are eager to join,” says one.

“I am not surprised,” says the other. “What surprises me is how easily we got the Romulans and the Cardassians to volunteer.”

“The Borg attacked their homeworlds,” explains the first admiral. “That raised their threat profile from ‘a threat to their enemies’ to ‘a threat to them’.”

---

Many Federation ships are parked in high orbit around the Earth while crews of spacemen fit long black strips of transwarp stabilizers to their hulls. A crewman looks up to see a large fleet of Tholian ships arrive. There are scores of them.

---

A crewman reports to Starfleet. “The Tholians request to be equipped with any additional weapons to fight the Borg, in addition to what we have already given them.”

An admiral sighs. “They will need transwarp stabilizers, but we do not have the facilities to deal with this many ships at once. Send some of them to Centauri, Vulkan, and Tellar.”

---

A team of crewmen are adding stabilizers to a Tholian ship when they see a large group of Ferenghi warships drop out of warp and settle into Earth’s orbit.

---

A Starfleet admiral walks through the courtyard with a Klipsi counterpart. “So you got the Ferenghi to join us?”

The Klipsi proudly smiles and nods.

“How did you manage to do that?” asks the admiral.

The Klipsi explains. “We told them that if they did not help us fight the Borg, we would make sure to send a Borg cube to their homeworld the next time the Borg choose to attack.”

The admiral looks down at the Klipsi in shock.

The Klipsi continues. “We also bribed them.”

“With what?” asks the admiral.

The Klipsi smiles and keeps it a secret. “Access to the Borg transwarp network has brought us into contact with... resources that certain people might find valuable.”

---

Admiral Picard again shares a cup of tea with his lady friend. “Is there any word from the Breen?” he asks her.

“The Breen have so far declined to get involved,” the other admiral informs Picard.

“That is too bad,” Admiral Picard says. He pauses to take a sip of tea before continuing. “I believe that they are the largest force that we have not already recruited.”

The other admiral speaks while Picard takes another sip. “We have asked them to at least send a token force as a diplomatic gesture, but so far they have refused.”

Admiral Picard gives an unhappy grunt and frowns as he sets his cup down on its saucer.

---

The USS Runnymede is in a fleet of over a hundred different ships of a dozen different powers. They come to a halt in the middle of empty space, and they wait.

A transwarp conduit opens for a few brief seconds as it expels a starship that resembles a shrunken Constitution-class ship.

On the Runnymede's bridge, Lt. Tomlinson scans the ship and reports to Captain Riker. "It is a Highwrit class. That is the Klipsi knockoff of the Constitution."

"Wait for their hail," Riker commands.

Riker's crew answers the broadcast, and the Klipsi bridge appears on screen. The Highwrit has been shrunk to the Klipsis' size, so the bridge is a normal size relative to them. It has also been upgraded with modern computer systems resembling those on any current Federation ship.

"The transwarp conduit is clear," reports the Klipsi captain. "We suggest that only one ship enter the conduit at a time until we are certain that there are no complications. If there are, you should drop out of transwarp immediately."

A Klingon ship floats forward from the others. The transwarp conduit opens and swallows the ship.

Captain Riker and his crew watch the empty space, as do the crews of every other ship in the fleet.

The transwarp conduit opens again and expels the Klingon ship.

The bridge crew of another Klingon ship sees them return in one piece, and they cheer. One of them shouts over the noise. "Ask them if we can go next!"

Three Federation ships enter the conduit at once. The assembled fleet waits for a few minutes before the three return.

The Klipsi captain makes another announcement to the fleet. "We have proven that we can safely send one ship, or three, but we will need to send an entire fleet. We will enter the conduit and keep scanning for any anomalies as every ship is tested, and then we will steadily increase the number of ships."

The Highwrit flies away and disappears into open transwarp conduit.

The other ships wait, and wait, and wait. Captain Riker looks around the bridge to his crew and makes a decision. "Take us in."

The Runnymede floats forward and enters the transwarp conduit.

Riker's crew is pleased to see that inter-ship communication works inside transwarp. Inside the conduit, take direction from the Klipsi captain on their viewscreen. "You will drop out of transwarp in three... two..."

There is a flash of radiation as the Runnymede appears in the middle of open space.

Riker speaks to his tactical officer. "The lights flickered. Give me a status report."

Lt. Tomlinson relays a report. "Engineering says that there was a power surge, but our systems were able to handle it."

Riker is glad to hear that, but unhappy about the mission. "Scan for the target, or... any debris."

The scan takes a few minutes to do its work, but it works.

“Captain,” Lt. Tomlinson reports, “we found an object with the same mass that fits the target, but it is not emitting any energy.”

“Set course anyway,” Riker tells the navigator.

“I am doing that right now,” says the navigator.

The Runnymede drops out of warp next to a disabled Cardassian warship that is equipped with the black stripes of transwarp stabilizers. They apparently did not work.

A Cardassian survived in a lightless room until light suddenly appears. A transporter beam deposits Lt. Tomlinson, and the light from the tricorder that he is holding blinds the Cardassian who rears back and covers his eyes.

Lt. Tomlinson activates his communicator and reports in immediately. “I found a survivor.” He speaks to the Cardassian. “We are here to help. What broke and how do we fix it?”

The Cardassian answers to the best of his ability. “Everything broke, and I don’t know how to fix it. I am not an engineer.”

Lt. Tomlinson reports in. “Tomlinson to whoever beamed into Engineering. Did you find anyone alive down there?”

Someone answers. “Yes. They are angry, but they are alive.”

With the help of replacement parts from the Runnymede’s fabricators, the Cardassian ship is soon operational. It aligns itself to float beside the Runnymede.

The Cardassian captain speaks to the Runnymede bridge. “We thank you for the assistance of your crew. You saved us several days of work.”

Captain Riker smiles. “We were glad to help, Captain. Now let’s go back to Earth and see if we can find out why your stabilizers failed. Now that you’re up and running again, we’ll race you there.”

The Cardassian captain laughs. “Our ship is not built for speed. But... we will test our engines and slow down if we experience another anomaly.”

Riker smiles.

The Cardassian ship goes to warp, and the Runnymede soon follows.