

# *The Big Bang*

*Story and Audioplay by Doug Zeitlin and Jim Caswell*

## Episode Summary

In this explosive first episode, the crew of the USS Aurora encounters a minefield along the Romulan border. The existence of this phenomenon in the wake of the Reman revolution and attempted attack on Federation space is compounded by the fact that Evori encountered one just like it over two hundred years in the past.

## Starring

Major Jacob Goldman	Ken Hallaron
Lt. Commander Eugene Westlake	Doug Zeitlin
Doctor Max Rembrandt	Jerry Hallaron
Lieutenant Mary Fitzgerald	Toni Hopeful
Evori	Jim Caswell
Commander Cal Isaacs	Greg Cheatham
Captain Patrick Michael Connerly	Matt Hallaron
Lt. Commander J'hos T'Minear	Ric Steele
Commander Frank White	Andy Fox
Commander Jared Tobin	M. E. Hopeful
Lt. JG Violetta Knorre	Joan Hallaron
Lieutenant Jax Card	Matt Hallaron
Ensign Eli Goldman	Ken Hallaron

## *and Featuring*

Captain Matthew Crichton	Oscar Hopeful
Lieutenant Chang Lao	Johnathen Michaels
Warbird Commander	Steve Cain
Ops Officer	Graham E. Hopeful

## Stardates

Deep Space 5	57195.8	August, 2380
Challenger		May, 2156

## PROLOGUE

### SCENE 1 – ENTER VO.

CRICHTON

Captain’s log: May 25, 2156. After the completion of our last mission, and the tragedy that ensued, we were grateful for the arrival of our latest dispatches. It had been two weeks since we last received letters from home. With tensions already high, they’ve been looking for an outlet for venting. <beat> Of particular interest was the recording of the World Series. While the sport declined over a decade ago, a recent resurgence of nostalgia has brought it back in recent years. We received games four and six in our last dispatch, a few prayers were heard muttered that we would be able to see the rest. In addition to the shock of the Chicago Cubs beating the Tokyo Dragons in the playoffs, the surprise inside-the-park homerun saved the Cubs in game six of the series. Lieutenant Commander Westlake was pleased by this unexpected turn of events. Goldman’s only reply was “Deus Ex Machina.”

*CUT INT.: Mess Hall - Challenger*

SOUND: Background sounds of people enjoying themselves

MAJOR GOLDMAN

They don’t stand a chance, Eugene.

WESTLAKE

This is their.... their year, Jacob. I can feel it.

REMBRANDT

Scientifically speaking, the statistics are not in his favor.

WESTLAKE

Are you trying to sound Vulcan, Doc?

REMBRANDT

Does it.... bother you?

WESTLAKE

Yes!

REMBRANDT

Good.

SOUND: Bat hitting ball. Crowd shouts in approval, then disgust.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

That's out number two, Eugene. Bottom of the ninth and your boys are down by two, with only one man on. Care to pay up now?

WESTLAKE

We... we.... we still have a chance. It's not over until the fat lady sings.

FITZGERALD (sing-song)

Time to pay, Westlake.

WESTLAKE

You're not fat, Mary.

FITZGERALD

Thanks for noticing.

WESTLAKE

I.... I.... I....

REMBRANDT

You know, Eugene, that blushing is caused when the veins in the skin are supplied with beta-adrenoceptors, in addition to the common alpha-adrenoceptors, resulting in a marked redness of one's face.

FITZGERALD

Leave him alone, Doc. He's kinda cute when he's all flustered like that.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Cut it out, Lieutenant, or the doc may have to bring him some oxygen.

SOUND: The crowd roars, accompanied with banging on tables.

WESTLAKE

A hit! A hit! They got a hit!

MAJOR GOLDMAN

That and a dime will get you a cup of coffee.

FITZGERALD

Nowhere in this sector of space, it won't.

EVORI

What's a dime?

REMBRANDT

Not what it used to be.

WESTLAKE

Oh no. Benavidez is up to bat.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

He's what? Oh for fifteen right now?

WESTLAKE

What's Parkinson doing? Put in a pinch-hitter!

FITZGERALD

If you believed in prayer, this would be the time, Westlake.

WESTLAKE

Don't tempt me, Fitzgerald. I'm desperate.

SOUND: The room goes silent. Ball hits glove.

REMBRANDT (in old umpire voice)

Steeerike One!

WESTLAKE (whispered)

Oh God.

FITZGERALD

What was that?

WESTLAKE

Your idea.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

You must be desperate. Of course, two hundred and fifty years without the big win will do that to you.

WESTLAKE

It's only been two hundred and forty-eight years.

SOUND: The room goes silent again. Ball hits glove.

WESTLAKE

Damn!

FITZGERALD

That has to be the fastest blaspheme from a recent convert in history. <sing-song> Time to pay, Westlake.

REMBRANDT

Seriously though, boy. You need to calm down a bit. You're going to hyperventilate if you're not careful.

EVORI

Isn't that what you're aiming for?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

The bet was never fair to begin with. I won't expect ....

SOUND: Bat hits ball. The crowd goes silent, then explodes.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I don't freakin' believe it.

WESTLAKE (in tears)

I don't freakin' believe it!

SOUND: A kiss.

FITZGERALD

I know you're happy, Eugene, but you ever try that again, and I'll put you in traction.

WESTLAKE

Sorry. Sorry. Sorry!

REMBRANDT

It might be worth it, Eugene. I have very strong narcotics to ease the pain.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

What you have, Max, are empathic leaches from Mazar that feed on pain.

REMBRANDT

Whatever works. And I told you, call me "Old Sawbones."

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Not on your life, Max.

WESTLAKE (giggling)

I don't freakin' believe it.

FITZGERALD

No. He really does want people to call him that. It's gross.

EVORI

I don't think that's what he meant.

SOUND: Alarms sounding.

LAO

*Tactical alert. All hands to battle stations. Tactical alert.*

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I don't believe it.

FITZGERALD

What?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I guess hell really has frozen over.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT.: Holodeck – Deep Space 5**

EVORI

Computer, freeze program.

SOUND: Computer beeps.

CONNERLY

That was all well and good, Admiral, and seemed as though you all had a lot of fun, but may I be so bold as to ask what something that happened two hundred years ago has to do with us?

EVORI

You mean, besides the fact that it was one of the last great baseball games played?

CONNERLY

Yes sir.

EVORI

While it might not have frozen over, things were going there in a hand basket. And it looks as though they may be going there again.

SOUND: Cue Intro music and monologue.

## ACT I

**SCENE 1 – ENTER INT: Bridge - Challenger**

SOUND: Doors opening. Alarms are still sounding. Ship goes to warp.

LAO

Heading 173.94 mark 8, warp 4.5 engaged, Captain. Estimated time of arrival: 97 minutes.

CRICHTON

Acknowledged, Lieutenant Lao. Engineering.

SOUND: Communication chirp. Door closes.

ISAACS

Here.

CRICHTON

Cal. We need to hold warp factor 4.5 for 97 minutes.

ISAACS

As long as it's not bumpy, we could take it up to 4.7.

CRICHTON

Make it so.

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

LAO

Huh?

CRICHTON

Increase warp, Lieutenant.

LAO

Increasing warp to 4.7. New estimated time: 79 minutes.

CRICHTON

I just hope they can hold out that long. Fitzgerald, Evori, Westlake. Join me in the situation room.

FITZGERALD

Aye, Captain.

SOUND: Footfalls.

CRICHTON

Lao, take us off of tactical alert. If I have to listen to that for the next hour and a half, I'm going to start talking to myself.

LAO

Aye, Captain.

SOUND: Stop alarms.

CRICHTON

Five minutes ago, we received a distress call from the ECS Marco Polo. There has been an explosion that has crippled their engines and they're losing atmosphere. They don't know what caused the damage.

SOUND: Computer beeps.

WESTLAKE

We'll be in sensor range in an hour.

FITZGERALD

These coordinates are accurate?

CRICHTON

I certainly hope so.

FITZGERALD

I recognize these from a tactical briefing from the Enterprise.

CRICHTON

I recall that they issued a no-fly zone on that area. What is the Marco Polo doing there?

FITZGERALD

Piracy?

CRICHTON

Let's not jump to conclusions, but also not take any chances. Bridge to MACOs.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

*MAJOR GOLDMAN*

*Goldman here.*

CRICHTON

Prepare an away party for a rescue mission. Be ready for possible hostiles.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

*Understood, Captain. I'm always ready for hostiles.*

CRICHTON

Bridge out.

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

EVORI

Do you believe pirates chased them in there, or that they are pirates?

FITZGERALD

A little of A, a little of B. Better to cover all our bases.

WESTLAKE

I've got the technical schematics here for the mines.

FITZGERALD

These are tricky suckers. We will need to use the quantum beacons to locate them.

EVORI

I'm not familiar with this situation. Why do we need the quantum beacons?

WESTLAKE

In spite of the fact that the Vulcan High Command disavows the feasibility of a sensor shield or masking technology, the Enterprise encountered a field of explosive devices that were "cloaked" from standard scans. Theoretically, with enough energy, light and other EM waves can be redirected around an object, making it functionally invisible. In order to complete this task, however, the object in question would need to have access to energies equivalent to a small sun, or a warp reactor one hundred times stronger than anything the Challenger could generate. Building on this theory....

FITZGERALD (interrupting)

While standard sensor scans don't detect the mines, the advanced technology of the quantum beacons can pick them up, just like the Suliban ships.

CRICHTON

But as the NX ships are the only ones to be outfitted with the beacons, the cargo ship would have been blind as a bat.

FITZGERALD

Exactly.

EVORI

Why didn't the Enterprise drop warning buoys?

FITZGERALD

If I remember everything correctly, the Enterprise's captain and weapon's officer were disarming a mine that had attached to their hull while the ship was being chased by enemy forces. Quite frankly, they didn't have time.

CRICHTON

We'll take the time.

WESTLAKE

If I modify the buoys with quantum beacon technology....

CRICHTON

Can you do that in the next sixty minutes?

WESTLAKE

No. It'll take days.

CRICHTON

Then let's focus on what we can do now. The less time we are floating around in the middle of a minefield with potential enemies waiting to swoop down on us like a bird of prey, the better.

EVORI

Like some great bird of the galaxy?

CRICHTON

Something like that.

FITZGERALD

It would be best if we can just maneuver around the mines and tow the ship out.

CRICHTON

If the Enterprise had to defuse one of the mines, isn't that in their report as well?

WESTLAKE

It's in the schematics....

FITZGERALD

.... But they're a real bitch to disarm.

CRICHTON

Can it be done if it's needed?

FITZGERALD

Anything can be done if it's needed. It's just something I would rather avoid.

WESTLAKE

I wouldn't be caught dead out on the hull of a ship.

EVORI

Westlake. You've passed the zero G simulations. You have the requisite hours of pressure suit training. You personally inspect your own suit at least twice a week to ensure its integrity. You're fear of spending any time in the vacuum of space is irrational.

WESTLAKE

Irrational fear is fear none-the-less. As a trained counselor, you should know that.

CRICHTON

With any luck, all of that will be a moot point.

FITZGERALD

I think the Cubs just used up all the luck for this century.

EVORI

Computer, time jump ahead seventy-two minutes and continue in observation mode.

SOUND: Computer beep followed by holodeck change sound

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT: Bridge - Challenger**

SOUND: Bridge background noise.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Captain. The MACOs are ready and on standby in shuttlepods one and two.

LAO

Grappling cables are deployed. Quantum beacons are online.

ISAACS

Warp field is stable and ablative armor is online.

WESTLAKE

Getting a good signal from them, Captain. Minefield is dead ahead.

CRICHTON

Evori. Try raising the Marco Polo.

<beat>

EVORI

Communications appear to be disabled, Captain. Even their emergency signal has stopped.

FITZGERALD

Captain, torpedoes are loaded and phase cannons are online.

CRICHTON

Westlake. Scan the vessel and see what's going on over there.

WESTLAKE

I'm reading all twenty-two lifesigns, strong but fading. Main power is offline and backup is at twelve percent. Seventy-eight percent of the atmosphere has escaped and... <beat> Oh boy.

CRICHTON

Oh boy?

FITZGERALD

I hate it when worse case scenarios come true.

CRICHTON

Exactly which worse case scenario are we talking about here?

WESTLAKE

A mine has attached itself to her hull, directly above the antimatter containment field.

FITZGERALD

The good news is that this area of the ship is heavily shielded, primarily to protect against attack.

ISAACS

But the bad news is that, with power, and therefore containment shields so low, any explosion is libel to blow the core and set off a chain reaction that will blow half this star system to hell.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

My MACOs are ready to launch. I volunteer to defuse the mine.

FITZGERALD

Forget that. I'll disarm the mine; you lead your team.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Sergeant Hudson is perfectly capable of leading the team. You're place is here on the bridge.

FITZGERALD

My place, Major, is wherever the hell I say it is.

CRICHTON

Small correction, there. Your place is wherever the hell I say it is.

FITZGERALD

Sorry sir, but I've specialized in munitions. His job is helping secure the Polo.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

My job is maintaining security away from the ship. You take care of the ship. The mine isn't attached to the Challenger, it's attached to the Marco Polo, thus away from the ship.

LAO (mumbling)

American egos.

WESTLAKE

We've spent the past hour going over the schematics and formulating proper procedures to avoid the same difficulties Lieutenant Reid encountered. It really is safest for Mary to defuse the mine as she has the familiarity.

FITZGERALD

Glad you agree, Lieutenant Commander, as you're coming with me.

WESTLAKE

Whaa?

FITZGERALD

As you just stated, we've gone over the schematics for the last hour.... together.

WESTLAKE

I... I... I can't.

CRICHTON

Please explain.

WESTLAKE

I will be needed at the science station during the mission.

ISAACS

I'm fully rated on the science station. I can handle getting whatever readings may be needed.

WESTLAKE

It... it... it's more than just taking readings. I need to actively scan of the area to monitor the progress of the away parties, the stability of the cargo vessel, measure the volatility of the mine while it's being disarmed and to watch for any spatial anomalies that may represent the arrival of the alien space crafts that were reported in this area.

ISAACS

I installed the quantum beacons and have memorized the specs. I know their functions as well as you do. Lao can monitor for anomalies and keep an eye on the cargo vessel. If the lieutenant wants you with her, you should go.

WESTLAKE

But it's not safe to have two senior officers in such a dangerous situation.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

There is nothing in the Starfleet charter about being safe.

WESTLAKE

Evori. As a qualified counselor, you understand that, although my fears are irrational, they are no less real. Due to my heightened state of panic, I'll be a liability more than an asset.

EVORI

Captain. On this one point, I must agree, and would therefore suggest that Doctor Rembrandt administer a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. This should temporarily alleviate the symptoms of his Kenophobia.

WESTLAKE

I'm not afraid of empty space. I'm afraid of sucking vacuum, less commonly known in Latin as *horrorvacui*.

LAO

You check and double-check your space suit at least once a week. You know that it's in perfect working order. Don't you trust your own competence?

WESTLAKE

I... I... I...

CRICHTON

Enough. This isn't a debate, nor do we work off the volunteer system. We choose the best person for the job to make sure it gets done right. Whether you like it or not, Lieutenant Commander, you're in Starfleet, and the best man to ensure Fitzgerald's safe return. You're going. Suit up and see the doctor, then tell him to report to shuttlepod two to accompany the boarding party. I want him on hand for medical emergencies. That's an order; end of discussion.

WESTLAKE

Ummm.... Yes sir.

CRICHTON

Good man. Let's get to work, people.

EVORI

Computer, freeze program.

SOUND: Computer chirp, followed by transition music.

## ACT II

**SCENE 1** – *ENTER INT: Holodeck – Deep Space 5*

SOUND: Computer chirp.

EVORI

During the past two weeks, four ships carrying relief supplies for planets within the Romulan Star Empire have been reported missing. Data from the USS Magellan confirms our worse fears; ships have been destroyed with all hands lost. Early reports from Starfleet Intelligence suggest the possibility that the same mines that we encountered remain active or have recently been reactivated as it has been occurring in the same sector.

WHITE

What makes Starfleet think that two hundred year old technology is still functional? Do they think the fire of these mines was stolen by Prometheus and contained in the works of Hephaestus?

TOBIN

You've been reading ancient mythology again, haven't you?

WHITE

Well, you told me to cut back on the Galactic Enquirer.

T'MINEAR

Why does Starfleet believe this ancient technology can have such devastating effects on modern starships? After all, the NX-01 encountered one and still managed to escape without complete destruction.

EVORI

I will concede the fact that it is strange. In answer to both questions, the age of the equipment may be the source of the problem, as explosives have been known to become less stable with age.

TOBIN

Providing that this theory is correct, wouldn't that make these mines incredibly dangerous to disarm at this point?

EVORI

A very good point, Commander Tobin.

T'MINEAR

To reiterate a point made by Major Goldman, nobody ever said Starfleet was safe.

EVORI

I may send officers under my command into harm's way, but I make it a point to never send anyone blindly into situations they cannot handle. In this case, I believe the best course of action would be to find the location of the mines and destroy them from a distance rather than try to disarm them.

T'MINEAR

We would all lay down our lives without a whimper if called to. No offense was intended, Admiral.

EVORI

None was taken J'hos, but please, don't plan on giving your life too soon.

T'MINEAR (hearty)

I plan to live a long life with many victories behind my name, Admiral.

WHITE

We should also consider the possibility this may be a new mine construct. We've seen the effectiveness of the mines used in the Bajoran sector during the Dominion War. There are factions that would benefit from continued hostilities between the Romulan Empire and the Federation. The Breen or the Cardassians, just to name a few. And that doesn't even mention the possibility of it being one of the many espionage groups floating around out there.

TOBIN

You mean like the Tal Shiar, Commander White?

WHITE

Just to name one. For all we know, it could be the Orion Syndicate. They could stand to make a lot of latinum on the black market trade.

TOBIN

The Ferengi could make just as much on the open market. Politics may be different on Ferengenar now, but they're still more than willing to earn a profit, and I'm sure there are still quite a few of them that would be willing to stoop to unscrupulous means to do so.

CONNERLY

All reported starships missing have been Federation. This could solely be an attack on Federation interests. The more ships and personnel we loose on missions of peace, the less our people support these types of endeavors.

EVORI

The same could serve as a hindrance to the Romulans, Captain. After all, if our people don't support giving them aide and we cut them off, the chances of them surviving decrease dramatically.

CONNERLY

The Federation made peace with the Klingons after years of open war. I would hope we could do the same with the Romulans.

T'MINEAR

Hopefully a peace that doesn't break down every five years.

EVORI

The Klingon civil war wasn't aimed at the Federation. Besides, you can't blame the Empire for the actions of the Duras clan.

WHITE

Again, though, we can come back to the actions of the Romulan Empire. Let's not forget their involvement in that situation. To go one step further, the Remans are largely responsible for the situation the Empire is in now. They may want to continue the chaos.

CONNERLY

We could stand here and speculate all day as to the cause of this situation. We need to concentrate more on the effect.

EVORI

Agreed.

T'MINEAR

A question. How did the NX-03 come across quantum beacon technology? It's equal to the scanners we have today.

EVORI

Starfleet played a bit more fast and loose with temporal anomalies than we do today. We had yet to establish the temporal prime directive.

WHITE

Are you saying that you received and used technology from the future?

EVORI

Of course not. The Enterprise did. <beat> And proceeded to share it with the rest of the fleet. And you're still using it today. The basic principles of this technology allow us to create things like quantum torpedoes, as well as the sensors we use daily.

WHITE

So you're saying that, if Starfleet hadn't received futuristic technology in the past, then we wouldn't have access to modern technology, which was future technology to them, today?

TOBIN (under breath)

I hate causality loops.

EVORI (to White)

That's not necessarily true, White. Perhaps, given the opportunity and motivation, Commanders Tucker and T'Pol may have created the technology anyway.

WHITE

Yeah, and the guy who invented transparent aluminum just stumbled upon the recipe.

TOBIN

Like I said....

EVORI

In the end, however, this type of situation is why the TPD was created, and why every ship that gains futuristic technology should be quarantined.

TOBIN

What's the status of the Magellan?

EVORI

It has returned to its regular duty schedule and Starfleet wants to send a more research-oriented vessel to investigate. Seeing as the Titan is already helping with the Romulan rebuilding and we're so close to the boarder, the Aurora has been chosen for the detail.

WHITE

Yeah. Research vessel. One that can break apart into three independent combat ships.

TOBIN

The Prometheus-class was developed here at Deep Space 5 during the middle of the Dominion War. Every ship was designed for battle and called a 'research vessel.'

WHITE

An oxymoron, like Starfleet Intelligence.

EVORI

Captain Connerly. You have the full resources of Deep Space 5 at your disposal.

CONNORLY

I would request that the Horizon and the Rosemont accompany us. With more ships, we can cover a larger area of space in a shorter period of time, and both ships have a larger science complement than we do.

EVORI

Agreed. The Rosemont is currently docked, and we can send the Horizon along once they get back from their escort run. They're also bringing in our new station Ops Officer.

CONNORLY

Commander. Coordinate with the Rosemont. I want us to be underway by 17:20 hours.

TOBIN

Yes Captain.

CONNERLY

White. T'minear. Research everything we've got on those mines. Based on the damage yield reported, study them and calculate a safe distance from which we can detonate them.

T'MINEAR

Figure out how to blow them up real good. Yes sir.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

CONNERLY

Connerly to Aurora.

*KNORRE*

*Aurora here, Captain.*

CONNERLY

Have Lieutenant Card plot us a course to Sector 352. We're on our way back.

*KNORRE*

*Aye.*

*CARD*

*Romulan Neutral Zone. I'm on it, Captain.*

CONNERLY

Connerly out.

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT:** *Bridge – USS Aurora*

VO:

CONNERLY

Captain's log, stardate 57195.8. We have just arrived in the Romulan Neutral Zone and are preparing to begin our scans for the mysterious mines in the area. As to be expected, tensions are running a bit high, but thanks to Commander Tobin's -uhm-encouragement, the crew has other things to worry about than the potential threats outside, as the First Officer's threats are real and have an immediate response. On a personal note, based on my experience, I'd rather face a Romulan warbird than Commander Tobin's wrath. But, then again, that's why I chose him as my First Officer.

SOUND: Bridge background noise.

TOBIN

Acknowledged, Rosemont. Proceed with search pattern echo poppa three. Mr. T'minear will maintain scheduled contact intervals every fifteen minutes. Aurora out.

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

TOBIN

Mr. Card. Prepare to execute search pattern echo sierra two.

CARD

Course laid in Commander.

CONNERLY

Engage.

T'MINEAR

We have four class-4 probes programmed for whisker formation and six class-one probes ready for launch at your command, Captain.

CONNERLY

Make it so, Lieutenant Commander.

SOUND: Probes launching.

T'MINEAR

Probes away.

WHITE

Sensors are running hot and at full capacity. We are receiving clear data streams from all probes, as well as from the Rosemont.

TOBIN

Reroute all information back through Ops, Commander.

CONNERLY

And now we wait.

CARD (deadpan)

Wheee. My favorite part.

TOBIN

Did you have something to add, Mr. Card.

CARD (busted)

No sir.

TOBIN

Good. Keep it that way.

CONNERLY

Lieutenant Commander T'minear, are you ready to plot destruction sequences when we find the mines? I'd like to make this as smooth as possible. You know, as little collateral damage as possible.

T'MINEAR

Aye, sir. Tactical crew has developed several scenarios to prevent unnecessary risk to our ships. This'll be as easy as shooting swampbats from an old Z-13 back on Tiburon.

WHITE

That may be more difficult than you expect. So far, all sensor data for anomalies are coming up empty.

TOBIN

You've used the quantum pulses and inter-phasic resonators?

WHITE

I've used everything we have except for throwing on a space suit and walking through the minefield.

CARD

Careful, Commander. That might be next.

KNORRE

If so, Lieutenant, I zink ve know who zey vill ask to wolunteer.

CONNERLY

Well, we know that we're in the right sector. Does anyone have any theories?

CARD

Maybe they're of Russian manufacture.

TOBIN

Useful hypotheses, Lieutenant.

WHITE

Maybe they are a recent manufacture with upgraded cloaking technology. You know, something created especially for the Tal Shiar.

CONNERLY

Not completely unreasonable.

T'MINEAR

We could fire a quantum torpedo at twenty-five percent efficiency to see if we get a reaction.

CONNERLY

Prepare the torpedo while we see if there are any other suggestions.

CARD

We could emit a tachyon pulse from the main emitter.

WHITE

I would need to take main power off-line for fifteen minutes to recalibrate the emitter, but that would give us some serious sensor boosts.

T'MINEAR

It would also take the shields off-line and leave us vulnerable to attack or accidental mine explosions for a significant amount of time.

TOBIN

Perhaps the Rosemont could modify their emitter while we stood guard.

CONNERLY

Let's hold that one in reserve. Anything else?

KNORRE

If we brought the Rosemont closer, we could use the two ships and the probes to establish a sensor net. If we wait for the Horizon, however, we could expand the range of the net by sixty-six percent.

CONNERLY

Sounds like our most viable *immediate* option is the torpedo, then. Mr. T'minear?

T'MINEAR

Ready when you are, Captain.

KNORRE

Notifying the Rosemont, Captain.

CONNERLY

Very good. Fire at will.

SOUND: Torpedo firing. <beat> Torpedo exploding.

WHITE

Sensors read debris and fallout as normal. No anomalies detected.

T'MINEAR

A wider disbursement of torpedoes, Captain?

CONNERLY

I'm not sure if spitting into the wind is going to do us any good.

KNORRE

This may sound silly, Captain, but what if all the mines have been detonated?

CARD (acknowledging)

The minefield may be out of mines.

T'MINEAR

With the loss of four ships in the past two weeks, the odds against them finding the last four mines are astronomical.

CONNERLY

Agreed, but I must admit that the question was entering my mind as well.

TOBIN

Captain, I suggest attempting the sensor net as our probes reach their maximum efficiency range.

CONNERLY

Let's give it a shot, and we can always expand it later.

KNORRE

Sending word to zee Rosemont, Captain. <beat> They are on their way.

CONNERLY

If this one doesn't work, we'll prep for tri-separation to provide maximum coverage for the ....

SOUND: Ship explosion and shaking.

TOBIN

Red Alert! Report!

SOUND: Warning claxons.

T'MINEAR

There's been a large explosion in the vicinity of the Rosemont.

WHITE

Correction, there has been a large explosion on the Rosemont. It's caused massive destruction.

KNORRE

Scanning for survivors.

WHITE

Energy readings show the warp core was breached, followed by cascading explosions throughout the entire ship.

CONNERLY

How'd they hit a mine? Didn't the sensors pick up anything?

T'MINEAR

I've reviewed the sensor data, Captain. There were no anomalies detected.

WHITE

Confirmed Captain.

KNORRE

There are five weak life signs, Captain. I've beamed them directly to sickbay.

CONNERLY

What the bloody Hell are we dealing with here?

SOUND: Transition music.

## ACT III

**SCENE 1** – *ENTER INT: Captain's Ready Room – USS Aurora*

SOUND: Door buzz.

CONNERLY

Enter.

SOUND: Door opening.

TOBIN

All departments have reported in Captain.

SOUND: Doors closing.

CONNERLY

What's the bad news, Commander?

TOBIN

Not as bad as could be expected. The Aurora managed to avoid any damage from the explosion, despite all the debris. Shields are back up to one hundred percent, and White is down in engineering double-checking all systems.

CONNERLY

That's the good news, Commander Tobin. I asked for the bad.

TOBIN

The last five crewmen from the Rosemont didn't make it, sir. Esposito said that they'd already suffered extensive tissue damage from both the explosion and the decompression. There was nothing he could do.

CONNERLY

All hands lost. Eleven hundred and forty-four officers, crewmen, and family dead, with no answer as to why in sight.

TOBIN

We are *going* to solve this, sir.

CONNERLY

Damn right we're going to solve this. The part that bothers me is, how many more lives are going to have to be sacrificed in the meantime?

SOUND: Silence – 2 count, followed by communication chirp.

*KNORRE*

*Sensors have picked up a Romulan warbird decloaking on an intercept course, Captain. Arrival in twelve minutes.*

CONNERLY

Twelve minutes? They didn't wait to decloak until they were right on top of us?

TOBIN

Perhaps they want to talk before blowing us out of the sky.

CONNERLY

How kind of them. Who am I to argue? Knorre, open hailing frequencies. Commander Tobin and I will be right out. Red alert.

SOUND: Warning claxons. Doors opening. Doors closing.

T'MINEAR

Shields at one hundred percent, Captain. Phasers are online and all torpedo tubes are locked and loaded.

CARD (mumbled)

We come in peace, shoot to kill.

KNORRE

Frequencies open, Captain.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

CONNERLY

This is Captain Patrick Michael Connerly of the Federation Starship Aurora. We are currently investigating the loss of several ships in this area and would be thankful for any assistance you may wish to render.

SOUND: Main viewer online.

*WARBIRD COMMANDER*

*We have been monitoring the situation, Captain. The Romulan Star Empire sends its condolences to the families of those tragically lost aboard your fellow vessels. But I wish to remind you, Aurora, that you are dangerously close to Romulan space. You will turn your ship around and return to Federation space immediately.*

CONNERLY

You realize, Commander, that we are currently involved in rendering assistance to the Romulan Star Empire.

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*And on behalf of my people, I thank you for your people's assistance. That does not, however, give you the right to enter our space without permission. Please leave now.*

CONNERLY

If you are monitoring our situation, then you are well aware of the loss of four other ships in this sector of the Neutral Zone. We are strictly on a research mission that will result in safer space travel for both our races.

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*The ships that have been destroyed have been Federation ships. WE are in no danger.*

CARD

You son of a...

TOBIN

Can it Mister.

CONNERLY

Commander, you must understand...

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*No, Captain, you must understand. You are in violation of the Treaty of Algeron establishing the Neutral Zone. You have committed an act of war and are to leave the Neutral Zone immediately. We are currently ten minutes from your location. If you and your ship are still there when we arrive, we will enforce the Treaty by any means necessary.*

T'MINEAR

Captain. They have raised shields and armed their disruptor arrays.

CONNERLY

Commander, I am sure that if we could communicate civilly....

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*We have been civil, Captain. We gave you a warning. You now have nine minutes to leave our space.*

CONNERLY

We know the history of this area of space. We know about the minefield.

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*As per the treaty, the minefield was dismantled and full disclosure was given.*

CONNERLY

Then how in the Hell do you explain what has been going on out here.

WARBIRD COMMANDER

*It's not our responsibility to explain anything further. Leave. Now.*

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

KNORRE

They have broken off communication, Captain.

TOBIN

What do you want to do, Captain?

T'MINEAR

Phasers and torpedoes are at the ready, sir.

CARD

As are the warp engines.

TOBIN

Captain?

CONNERLY

Stand down. I'm not going to start a war without having all the facts and with some of our people behind enemy lines. <beat> Set a return course to Deep Space Five. Knorre, I want you to drop class-8 sensor probes and warning buoys on our side of the boarder before we go to warp. I don't want anyone else going in this way until we know for certain what's going on.

CARD

Course laid in, Captain.

KNORRE

Probes and buoys ready, Captain.

CONNERLY

Launch and go. Take us home, Lieutenant Card.

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT.:** *Admiral's Office – Deep Space 5*

CONNERLY

Admiral, what still disturbs me is that the Romulan Commander all but admitted that the minefield was active again. They're not normally so direct.

EVORI

Yet, what he actually said was that the minefield was properly disposed of. He was a bit more circumspect about the recent chain of events. In my experience, Romulans say as much by what they withhold as by what they actually say.

CONNERLY

He said that they were not in danger. What else could they have meant by that?

EVORI

That is a good question, my dear Captain. He certainly knows something that we do not.

CONNERLY

That is the Romulan way. Always plotting and scheming, making things happen while they wait in the vestry.

EVORI

What we have to determine is what the Romulans benefit from keeping Federation aide out of their empire. Rest assured, Patrick Michael; this is not over.

CONNERLY

Not by a long shot. <beat> When I was thinking about those five crewmen, the story you showed us from the Challenger came to mind, specifically the science officer.

EVORI

It came to my mind as well.

CONNERLY

You didn't tell us the end of the story. How did your excursion into the neutral zone go?

EVORI

Oh, well, as you know, we were at the minefield, trying to rescue the Marco Polo while a mine was attached to its hull.

SOUND: Flashback music.

**SCENE 3 – CUT TO INT.: Bridge – Challenger**

EVORI

Major Goldman's team is reporting in, Captain. Twelve of the twenty-two personnel have been recovered at this point. Doctor Rembrandt says that of the twelve, no one is in critical condition, though a few have been irradiated and will need to be isolated.

CRICHTON

What's Westlake and Fitzgerald's status?

ISAACS

Their efforts to diffuse the mine are going slowly, but they have an advantage the Enterprise didn't. So far, everything is going according to plan if not fitting to their timeframe.

CRICHTON

What is their estimated time to completion?

ISAACS

Not sure. They're worrying more about not setting off the mine than what time it is.

EVORI

What's Eugene's condition?

ISAACS

Elevated respiration and blood pressure, but within Starfleet medical tolerances.

LAO

In other words, he's on the verge of hyperventilating, but the meds must be working because he hasn't completely lost his mind ... yet.

CRICHTON

He'll be fine. He has a distinguished mind. You would do well to remember that, Lieutenant Lao.

LAO

I meant no offense, Captain. I just don't understand why anyone would ask to serve aboard a starship if they can't handle working in space.

CRICHTON

Starfleet would not put any officer in a position where they would endanger the other personnel aboard a starship. For whatever reason he's out here, the brass must have believed he could handle it, and that's good enough for me.

LAO

Well, if he had been a part of the China Space Program, it wouldn't have mattered how smart he was; he wouldn't have been allowed to serve.

CRICHTON

Well, I guess it's a good thing that Starfleet absorbed your space program then. Now, Lieutenant, are the grapplers ready for launch?

LAO

Ready as soon as the mine is disabled.

CRICHTON

Commander, is there any sign of company?

ISAACS

Not that I can tell, Captain, but keep in mind that, even with the quantum beacons, the Enterprise never saw them coming.

CRICHTON

Well, keep an eye open anyway.

ISAACS (mumbling)

Very funny.

EVORI

Goldman has found the rest of the crew, Captain. They turned one of their cargo bays into a storm shelter. All hands are accounted for.

CRICHTON

Fantastic. Tell them to haul tail back here.

ISAACS

More good news, Captain. Mary and Eugene just bypassed the last failsafe. The mine is floating free.

CRICHTON

Can we grab it for examination?

LAO

That wouldn't be wise, Captain. Grabbing it with a grappling hook may still set it off.

ISAACS

And I, for one, don't like the idea of a live mine being in our cargo bay.

CRICHTON

OK, I see your point. We should probably count our blessings. Tell them to detonate the mine once it's a safe distance from the ships and other mines. Grab the Marco Polo and plot a course, Lao.

LAO

Course laid in.

EVORI

Shuttlepod one has picked up Mary and Eugene and both one and two are on their way back.

CRICHTON

As soon as they're aboard, let's head for home.

SOUND: Flashback music.

## EPILOGUE

### SCENE 1 – ENTER INT.: Admiral's Office – Deep Space 5

EVORI

With the ship in tow, it took us sixteen days to reach a suitable drydock to drop off the Marco Polo and her crew. Doctor Rembrandt was able to treat all of the wounded and they had even managed to begin repairs on their ship before we arrived.

CONNERLY

It sounds as though it was about as close to a happy ending as could be managed.

EVORI

It could have been a lot worse.

CONNERLY

Tell me about it. How long after that did the Earth-Romulan War begin?

EVORI

Just a couple of months.

CONNERLY

What about Lieutenant Commander Westlake? Did the experience help him with his fears?

EVORI

Not really. You might even say it got worse, which just made his determination to prove his worthiness on the crew even greater.

CONNERLY

Why did Starfleet Medical pass his psych evaluation with such an obvious phobia?

EVORI

When it comes down to it, Westlake was tremendously gifted. If he put his mind to it, there was nothing that he couldn't accomplish. Well, almost nothing. In this case, he wanted to join Starfleet.

CONNERLY

Did you ever learn what made him want to join Starfleet?

EVORI (laughing)

Yeah, but that's a story for another time.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

*OPS OFFICER*

*Sorry for interrupting, Admiral, but you wanted to be notified when the new Ops Officer arrived.*

EVORI

That's OK; we were just finishing up in here. Send him in when Captain Connerly leaves.

*OPS OFFICER*

*Understood.*

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

CONNERLY

You, know, Admiral, for every story that you tell, I get the feeling there are two secrets you're not sharing.

EVORI

Yeah, maybe there's a little Romulan in my bloodline somewhere.

CONNERLY

Funny, sir.

EVORI

But seriously, as I said before, Captain, we'll find out who's responsible for this and get it taken care of. Remember....

CONNERLY

All good things come to those who wait.

EVORI

And listen.

SOUND: Door opening.

CONNERLY

Thank you sir.... for everything.

EVORI

You're welcome, Patrick Michael.

**SCENE 2** – <beat>

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

You wanted to see me, Admiral Evori?

EVORI

Yes, yes. Come on in. How was your trip?

SOUND: Door closing.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Longer than expected, sir. We took a brief detour through the Talbot Cluster. We came across a magnetic storm that the Captain decided to observe. Fortunately, the Chief Science Officer allowed me to assist and we gathered some very interesting data.

EVORI

Wonderful. I'll look forward to reading your report.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Permission to speak freely, sir?

EVORI

Granted, but already? What, was the transporter not to your liking?

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

No. No, sir. Not a complaint. I'm just curious.

EVORI

A good trait for a Starfleet Officer to have. Go ahead.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

The grapevine has it that you specifically requested me for this assignment.

EVORI

Oh really? Seems the grapevine needs a little trimming.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Did I hear wrong, sir?

EVORI

I didn't say that, Ensign.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I just wasn't expecting my first assignment out of the academy to be on a Deep Space Station. <beat> Though I'm glad to be here, sir. I expected more of a grunt job my first time out.

EVORI

There are plenty of grunt jobs on a space station, Ensign.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN (disappointed)

Oh.

EVORI

As it is, though, our former Ops Officer recently transferred aboard my fleet flagship, the USS Aurora, and you seemed qualified for the job.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Oh. Well, thank you, sir. It's an honor.

EVORI

Let's see if you still think so after an Orion Captain has been yelling at you for a half hour because he had to wait in line for a parking orbit.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I'm fresh out of the academy, Admiral. I'm used to being yelled at. One more question, sir?

EVORI

Sure. We're on a roll. Go ahead.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Is that an actual, honest-to-God baseball on your desk?

EVORI

Well, *Ensign Goldman*, <beat> that's not just any baseball. It's a World Series ball. Have a seat and I'll tell you a story.

CUT: Ending music and credits.

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