



## *Tough Decisions*

*Story by Jim Caswell*

*Audioplay by Jim Caswell, Doug Zeitlin and Ken Hallaron*

### Episode Summary

As the possibility of conflict with the Romulan Star Empire builds in Sector 352, Evori reflects on the price of war.

### Cast List

Evori	Jim Caswell
Ensign Eli Goldman	Ken Hallaron
Lt. Commander Eugene Westlake	Doug Zeitlin
Commander Cal Issacs	Greg Cheatham
Lieutenant Mary Fitzgerald	Toni Hopeful
Major Jacob Goldman	Ken Hallaron

#### *Introducing*

Captain Matthew Crichton	Ryan Gilbert
Lieutenant Chang Lao	Zach De Witz

#### *and Featuring*

Sadapa Prime	George Gauthier
Isapi Soldier	John Wetherbe
Isapi Soldier #2	Chris Noble
Crustaran Prime Minister	Dave Brockman
Gothia	Tommy Gauthier

### Stardates

Deep Space 5	57591.2	January, 2381
Challenger		December, 2159

## PROLOGUE

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

SOUND: Door chime.

EVORI

Come.

SOUND: Door opens.

EVORI

What can I do for you, Ensign?

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Nothing specific, sir. May I speak freely?

EVORI

Of course.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Are you all right, sir?

EVORI

I beg your pardon?

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I'm sorry, sir. I don't mean to overstep my bounds.

EVORI

It's not that. I'm just wondering what makes you think I'm not all right.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Well, you've been verklempt the past couple of days. Usually, you're out and about, visiting station personnel, checking on various departments, listening to our woes and sharing your stories. But for the last several days, you've just come to your office and do your admiral things. You're here before I get in and you don't leave until after third shift starts.

EVORI

And you know that... *because?*

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

All the staff knows. *<beat>* I'm sorry. If you want me to mind my own business.... I should probably mind my own business.

EVORI

No, no, Ensign. It's fine. In fact, it shows a great deal of compassion on your part. It's a sign of a good friend and leader.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I'm sure some people would argue with you on that one, sir.

EVORI

I'm sure they would too. Have a seat, Eli.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Thank you, sir.

SOUND: A chair gets pulled out.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Is there anything I can do to help?

EVORI

That depends. Are you able to influence the minds of an entire race?

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Not yet, sir.

EVORI (laughing lightly)

Hehe. Actually, I wish it were that simple.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I take it you're referring to the Romulans.

EVORI

If they even call themselves that anymore.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN (questioningly)

I'm sorry?

EVORI

I've been going over situation reports from Starfleet Command. By the looks of them, the Romulan Star Empire appears to be trying to tear itself apart at the seams.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Is that necessarily a bad thing, Admiral?

EVORI

It is when innocents on all sides stand the risk of being hurt. Right now, there are no less than six different factions laying claim to power within this sector, each bringing in different plans of destruction to use against the others.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Do we have any idea which group is responsible for the border problems we've been dealing with?

EVORI

I'm not sure that any of them are responsible for it. It could be yet another faction. <beat> I shouldn't be worrying you about this.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

You once told me, sir, that if I ever needed to lighten the load, that you'd be willing to listen. Why can't I offer you the same?

EVORI

It's an awfully heavy load, Ensign. After all, the load increases exponentially as you earn more pips on your uniform.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I'll take my chances, sir. Besides, sometimes it just helps to talk about it.

EVORI (joking)

Are you bucking for a transfer into counseling?

ENSIGN GOLDMAN (joking back)

No sir. I'm not that crazy.

EVORI

You don't have to be crazy to be a counselor...

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

... But it sure does help.

SOUND: Evori laughs.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

No fair trying to switch the subject, sir. I'm here to listen if you'd like, but if it's none of my business, I'll respect your privacy.

EVORI

It's not that. If I didn't trust your capabilities or your discretion, I wouldn't have put you in this position.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Thank you, sir.

EVORI

Part of the reason I was assigned to this sector of space was because of the rising tensions in the area. With the fall of the Cardassian Empire during the Dominion War and the mess caused by Shinzon and the Romulans, the high brass felt it would be wise to put someone in charge out here that had previous experience dealing with the Romulans when their dander was up.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Makes sense to me.

EVORI

The problem is that my primary purpose is to avoid conflicts. Learning from history so that we aren't doomed to repeat it.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

You're talking about the Earth-Romulan War, right?

EVORI

Among others, yes. I feel like we're walking down a path that can't be avoided. It's as if there are forces driving us toward disaster, and I'm not sure I can keep us from getting there. Like someone wants us to fight the Romulans again.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Are you afraid of the Federation going to war again so soon? Do you think we'd lose?

EVORI

We never want to go to war, but winning and losing aren't nearly as important as making sure you're fighting for the right reasons. In fact, if the cause is just, you can't not go to war.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

What do you mean?

EVORI

Let me tell you a story from my days aboard the Challenger. It might help you understand. The Earth-Romulan War had been going on for three years, and we were mere months away from the Battle of Cheron.

SOUND: Cue Intro music and monologue.

# ACT I

## SCENE 1 – V.O.:

CRICHTON

Captain's log: December 21, 2159. In spite of my many objections, Starfleet has insisted on delivering some unwanted Christmas presents this year. We have been ordered to rendezvous with the ECS Thistlegorm to take aboard a complement of nuclear missiles. I will go ahead on record as being staunchly opposed to carrying nuclear weapons aboard this starship and in their use during the conflict against the Romulans. For us, until we are forced to give up our mission of exploration, these missiles will act as nothing but a target to any Romulans we may come across and a potential health hazard to my crew. Lieutenant Fitzgerald will be overseeing the process of sealing them in lead-lined storage lockers upon their arrival, and monitor them around the clock for potential leakage. While I am fully willing to serve and die for my world, I hope we can come to a peaceful resolution to this war soon.... before my crew is called upon to put their lives on the line.

*ENTER INT.: Bridge – The Challenger*

SOUND: Bridge background noise.

WESTLAKE

Captain.

CRICHTON

What is it, Lt. Commander?

WESTLAKE

I'm picking up some anomalous readings ahead of us, sir.

CRICHTON

What do you mean by 'anomalous?'

WESTLAKE

Long-range sensors are picking up strange energy patterns in Sector 30.

CRICHTON

Sector 30? That's near the Romulan border and the area of space that the Thistlegorm is coming through to meet up with us.

WESTLAKE

Yes sir. It seems to be a debris field, maybe a destroyed vessel.

CRICHTON

Evori. Raise the Thistlegorm.

EVORI

Yes sir.

CRICHTON

Lao. How long would it take us to get there if we increased speed?

LAO

We could be there in ninety minutes if we increased to warp 4.9.

CRICHTON

Go ahead and do it.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

CRICHTON

Bridge to engineering.

ISAACS

*Engineering here, Captain. I take it this has to do with the increase in speed we just experienced?*

CRICHTON

Confirmed. We're going to be running at 4.9 for the next hour and a half. I want you to not only keep us in good shape for the trip, but also be ready to run it longer after we get there.

ISAACS

*Expecting trouble, Captain?*

CRICHTON

Always. Bridge out.

SOUND: Communication disconnects.

EVORI

The Thistlegorm is not responding, Captain.

CRICHTON

I was afraid of that. Fitzgerald, have Goldman get the MACOs ready and make sure our systems are running hot when we enter the system.

FITZGERALD

Understood.

CRICHTON

Let's get ready, people. We might be getting involved in this sooner than any of us wanted.

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT.:** *Bridge – The Challenger*

SOUND: Alert claxons in background.

LAO

Leaving warp in thirty seconds, Captain.

CRICHTON

Understood. Weapons?

FITZGERALD

Locked and loaded, sir. MACO's are on alert.

CRICHTON

Westlake. Anything on sensors?

WESTLAKE

Nothing new, sir, but I must remind you that, if a Romulan vessel is cloaked, we wouldn't know it.

CRICHTON

At least, not until they're right on top of us. Is there any sign of survivors?

WESTLAKE

I'm not picking up any escape pods, Captain.

CRICHTON

What about radiation?

LAO

Fifteen seconds.

WESTLAKE

Lots...Standard background radiation, Captain. Nothing consistent with nuclear detonation. It looks like there may have been disruptor fire, or some other form of energy emission weapon.

CRICHTON

Give thanks for small favors.

WESTLAKE

Not necessarily, Captain.

LAO

Leaving warp.... Now.

SOUND: Warp drive decreases.

CRICHTON

Put the Thistlegorm on the screen.

SOUND: Screen activated.

FITZGERALD

There's.... there's nothing left. Just debris.

LAO

And not much of that.

CRICHTON

Stay sharp, people. Anything on sensors?

WESTLAKE

As usual, I was right. It appears an energy weapon destroyed the ship, but the dispersal isn't like anything we have on file. It's neither as powerful as our phase cannons nor Romulan disruptors.

CRICHTON

If it's not as powerful, then how did they breach the Thistlegorm's defenses?

WESTLAKE

Hard to tell without further study, Captain. There's one thing that's troublesome.

CRICHTON

Besides the death and destruction we're looking at?

WESTLAKE

Ah, yes sir. As I said before, I'm not picking up any traces of enriched plutonium or uranium.

CRICHTON

That's good, isn't it? It means that the Romulans didn't use nuclear weapons.

WESTLAKE

No sir, it's bad because it means the nuclear missiles the Thistlegorm was bringing us weren't aboard when the ship was destroyed. If the missiles were destroyed without detonating there'd be radioactive debris. If they were detonated... well, there's too much debris for that.

FITZGERALD

Oh boy.

CRICHTON

Romulans didn't attack the ship. Raiders hit it.

WESTLAKE

A fair assumption, Captain.

CRICHTON

Damned Naussicans.

FITZGERALD

There isn't proof that the Naussicans are responsible, Captain.

CRICHTON

The Naussicans are always responsible. Can you track their warp signature?

WESTLAKE

I'm working on pulling it out of the background radiation now, sir.

FITZGERALD

I'm looking at Eugene's readings, Captain. The weapons' energy signature doesn't match anything that the Naussicans use.

CRICHTON

It just means they've stolen a new form of weapon from someone else, just like they did here.

FITZGERALD

But why use a lower quality of weapon, sir?

CRICHTON

Who knows why the Naussicans do anything that they do.

FITZGERALD

But....

EVORI

Captain. I believe you're being a bit irrational. If the evidence points to someone other than Nausicans, it's only logical to move on.

CRICHTON (angry)

Just because you're an alien, Ensign, it doesn't mean you're a Vulcan and I don't need you to be throwing "logic" around.

SOUND: Silence – 3 beats.

CRICHTON

I'm sorry, Evori. You're right. There are bigger things going on here than my personal demons.

EVORI

Accepted, sir.

CRICHTON

It doesn't matter why they do, or even who did it. What matters is that we need to get those stupid nuclear missiles back before they're used on someone.

WESTLAKE

I've found a warp trail, captain. *<beat>* It doesn't match any known signature.

CRICHTON

Feed the coordinates to Lao and set a pursuit course. Evori, let engineering know that we'll be running hot a while longer.

WESTLAKE

Aye, Captain.

EVORI

Yes sir.

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 3 – CUT TO INT.: Bridge – The Challenger****SOUND: Communication chirp.**

ISAACS

*Engineering to bridge.*

CRICHTON

Go ahead, Cal. What's up?

ISAACS

*We've been running the engines at peak efficiency for hours now, Captain. We need to slow down.*

CRICHTON

Keep it going, Cal. We're in a hurry.

ISAACS

*You don't understand, Matthew. We need to slow down. I've done all I can with them, but if we don't slow down to at least Warp 2.5 and give them a chance to recover, we're going to blow something. They're not meant to be pushed this hard.*

CRICHTON

They're Warp 5 engines, Commander.

ISAACS

*For short periods, yes sir, but not for constant running.*

LAO

Sir?

CRICHTON

What is it?

LAO

I think we're approaching our destination.

ISAACS

*Finally.*

CRICHTON

Are you sure?

LAO

Of course. The warp signature is pointing directly at the third planet in the upcoming star system. If the ship didn't stop there, they flew right through the center of it.

CRICHTON

Westlake, wha'cha got?

WESTLAKE

Long-range sensors show three planets within the system to be Minshara class, all inhabited. The third planet has ships in orbit that have warp signatures, but just barely. Their matter/antimatter mixtures appear to be unstable and are likely incapable of achieving more than Warp 2, and even then at great risk.

LAO

That would have been more than enough to get them out to the attack site and back, though they probably only just beat us here.

CRICHTON

Any sign of the nuclear missiles?

WESTLAKE

Still looking, Captain, but I've found some other points of interest.

CRICHTON

Like what?

WESTLAKE

The other two inhabited planets seem to have much lower populations and appear to be in a stunted state of development, perhaps even in decline.

FITZGERALD

I'm picking up signs of debris and atmospheric damage on both planets, Captain, including former population centers that have suffered massive destruction.

CRICHTON

Have the missiles already been used?

WESTLAKE

It doesn't appear so, Captain. There's no sign of nuclear radiation in either atmosphere. The ambient radiation that is there appears to be consistent with matter/antimatter collision.

CRICHTON

Photon torpedoes?

WESTLAKE

Unlikely, sir. Judging by their ships and their warp capabilities, probably old antimatter bombs.

FITZGERALD

The energy dispersal pattern shows that they haven't been used in a while.

ISSACS

*They'd probably be too unstable to be used as a reliable weapon. They'd be just as likely to blow their own people to smithereens as their enemies.*

LAO (mumbling)

Yeah, and fission weapons are so much better.

CRICHTON

Cal, go ahead and get ready to cool your engines. Bridge out.

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

CRICHTON

Evori, tell Goldman to put a landing party together. I want to go planet-side and see what's going on down there.

WESTLAKE

It may take a while to track down where the missiles are located. The major may want to wait on launching until I can narrow down his search area.

CRICHTON

You can relay that information to me once you've got it, but we're launching ASAP.

FITZGERALD

Captain, by the looks of things, I can say with a bit of certainty that this isn't exactly the safest of locations. May I suggest that you let the MACOs handle this?

CRICHTON

You can suggest all you want, Lieutenant, but the great thing about being the captain is that I don't have to always listen.

FITZGERALD

Permission to come along, then, Captain.

CRICHTON

You don't trust the MACOs to watch my back?

FITZGERALD

I'd trust the MACOs with my life, sir. But your life is a different matter entirely.

WESTLAKE

I agree with Mary, sir. I'd still feel more comfortable, Captain, if you allowed me to complete my scans. Perhaps then you would be able to enter in disguise; Doctor Rembrandt could alter your appearance to blend in with the indigenous population.

CRICHTON

Maybe on our next trip. The goal this time around, though, is to not be seen, so we don't worry about what we look like. We're not aiming for a first contact, just information. We may need a translator, though. Evori, you're with us as well.

WESTLAKE

But...

SOUND: Door opening.

CRICHTON

You have the bridge, Lt. Commander.

WESTLAKE

But...

SOUND: Transition music.

## ACT II

**SCENE 1 – ENTER EXT.:** *Outskirts of Town – Isapi Three*

SOUND: City buzz.

FITZGERALD

Who goes there?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Relax, Fitzgerald. It's just us.

CRICHTON

Have any luck?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

We found some of these pullover frocks and were able to cross the perimeter, but the city is unlike anything I've ever seen.

CRICHTON

I wish I could say the same.

FITZGERALD

You've been places worse off than this?

CRICHTON

Not personally, but I've read about them. Unfortunately, this place isn't so different from some places back on Earth.

FITZGERALD

During World War III?

CRICHTON

I was thinking further back than that.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Medieval times?

CRICHTON

Not that far.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I hope you've been staying out of sight, Fitzgerald.

FITZGERALD

As far as I can tell. Why?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Let's just say they don't treat the fairer sex too well around here.

FITZGERALD

Come to think of it, I haven't seen many women.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I don't think they're allowed out of their homes.

CRICHTON

Evori. Have you had any luck in translating the language?

EVORI

I've got a basic linguistic pattern, sir, but I'll need to interact with someone to see if it works and to get the dialect mastered. The universal translator is working as well as could be expected, though, so we've got that going for us.

CRICHTON

Where did your group find the robes?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

There was a clothesline about eighty meters to the east. It's an old trick, but it works.

CRICHTON

Were there enough of them for the rest of us?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

No. As it is, sooner or later they'll notice that these are missing.

FITZGERALD

What about uniforms? I've seen a lot of men walking around in what's got to be military garb.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

We saw the soldiers too, but the uniform doesn't cover the face and we couldn't find any that weren't being worn.

CRICHTON

It seems as though every able-bodied male between thirteen and thirty is in the service.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

And hardly anyone older than that. For all intents and purposes, they conduct themselves as if they're actively at war.

FITZGERALD

Given what I saw aboard the Challenger, they aren't so much making war as they're delivering Armageddon.

CRICHTON

While it's clear from their ships that they're a warp-drive civilization, I'm not quite sure how they got there, given what we've seen so far.

EVORI

They're technological and sociological advancements don't match with normal warp capable civilizations. It's like they're feudal, maybe bordering on an industrial age, except for their military.

FITZGERALD

All things considered, they've probably channeled every discovery they've come up with into munitions making.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

CRICHTON

Crichton here. Did you get a location for us?

WESTLAKE

*Not yet, sir, but there's been a new development.*

CRICHTON

What's that?

WESTLAKE

*We just detected a major explosion in one of the few cities on the fourth planet. The destruction is massive.*

CRICHTON

Nuclear?

WESTLAKE

*No sir. The explosives were probably standard concussive ordinance, but with tonnage ranging in the tens of thousands. Initial detonation turned four city blocks into a crater. There will probably be the same number of casualties from the fallout damage.*

FITZGERALD

Any sign of how the explosives were delivered?

WESTLAKE

*Shortly after the away team landed, a shuttle was launched from the northern hemisphere and flew to the fourth planet. It landed at what became ground zero less than a minute later. Our scans of the shuttle indicate it was manned.*

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Suicide bombers?

WESTLAKE

*I believe so.*

SOUND: A PA system coming to life.

CRICHTON

Hang on a second, Westlake. It seems as though someone's going to make an announcement.

SADAPA PRIME

*People of Isapi, today is a day to rejoice! Once again, thanks to the courage of our young soldiers, a blow has been delivered to our sworn enemies.*

EVORI (quietly)

I guess my linguistic pattern works.

SADAPA PRIME

*Our sworn enemies, who strike fear into our children, rape our women and take what is rightfully ours. Rejoice, my people, and know that we will soon be gods among men!*

FITZGERALD (whispering)

Everyone down.

SOUND: As the PA shuts off, footfalls can be heard approaching.

ISAPI SOLDIER

All you dogs out of your huts! You heard the great Sadapa Prime, get out here. Show some gratitude to your ruler! *<beat>* You, old man. If I have to tell you one more time....

FITZGERALD

I'm gonna....

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Get back here, Mary. Don't do anything stupid. You're not going to do anyone.... Captain!

SOUND: Multiple PPG shots fired, followed by a guttural growl from CRICHTON.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Captain!

FITZGERALD <mumbles>

He tells me, don't do anything stupid.

SOUND: Crichton tackles the Isapi soldier and punches him. A communication chirp.

FITZGERALD

Fitzgerald to Challenger!

MAJOR GOLDMAN

MACOs! Cover fire!

SOUND: Phaser fire exchanged with PPG fire.

WESTLAKE

*Still here, Mary. What's going on down there?*

FITZGERALD

Get Cal down to the transporter room and grab the Captain. Get him back up there.

SOUND: More punches.

WESTLAKE

*What? Mary, you know those things aren't safe in large crowds.*

FITZGERALD

Neither's a hole in the chest! Get him out of here before he takes on the entire platoon himself.

EVORI

Captain! Get off him.

SOUND: Evori grunts while pulling and soldier moans.

WESTLAKE

*But he won't...*

ISAPI SOLDIER #2 (distant)

There! Get the intruder!

EVORI

Captain, he's quite unconscious now. He's not Nausican after all.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Eugene! Quit arguing and beam him up! Now! Evori too!

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO INT.: Transporter Room - Challenger**

SOUND: Transporter beam depowering.

CRICHTON

Wha! What's...

ISAACS

Calm down, Matthew. You're fine.

CRICHTON

Like hell I'm fine. What did you just do?

ISAACS

We beamed you aboard. Fitzgerald and Goldman said you were in danger. We just so happened to grab Evori at the same time because he was standing next to you.

EVORI

I'm fine, by the way. Thanks for asking.

CRICHTON

Of course I was in danger, but so are the rest of them. Send me back.

ISAACS

Matthew. Calm down. What's going on down there?

EVORI

Do you know how dangerous it is to beam two people up at the same time? You could have scrambled our molecules.

CRICHTON

Our people are in a firefight that I started. By God, if I'm going to start a fight, I'll be the one to finish it.

ISAACS

You started a fight? A firefight? With who?

EVORI

Fine. I give up. I'll just be back here listening if you need me.

CRICHTON

Soldiers. They were getting ready to open fire on their own people. Right after they launched that suicide attack on... that other planet.

ISAACS

You attacked the indigenous population?

CRICHTON

I attacked a representative of... oh, the hell with it. Yeah. I attacked a local because he was about to shoot an old man for not moving fast enough. And by the looks of things, he was acting with full consent of their dictator ruler, who encourages young boys to blow themselves up.

ISAACS

In large civilian populations.

CRICHTON

What?!

ISAACS

The four blocks that were blown up were in the middle of a residential area. The shuttle landed at the local school.

CRICHTON

If you're trying to calm me down, Cal, you're doing a lousy job!

EVORI

Maybe you should leave the counseling to me.

ISAACS

Well, if your going to loose your mind, you might as well know the full reason why you're going nuts.

EVORI

Oh yeah, definitely should leave the counseling to me.

CRICHTON

So beam me back already.

ISAACS

Can't. Under orders of Fitzgerald and Goldman.

CRICHTON

In case you forget, Commander, you outrank both of them. And I outrank you.

ISAACS

True, but I'm not about to get on Mary's bad side. Besides, you can do more good here.

CRICHTON

And how.... *<beat>* Wait a second.

ISAACS

And the light bulb goes on.

CRICHTON

Are the phase cannons ready and torpedoes armed?

ISAACS

Yes, but I wouldn't recommend opening fire on the planet.

CRICHTON

Tempting, but no. That would make us no better than they are.

EVORI

Well, that's good to hear.

CRICHTON

Evori. Get up to the bridge and put your translations in the database. I want to be able to talk to them by the time I get up there.

ISAACS

You aren't going there first? I think Westlake would like you to take over. He's none-to-happy at this point.

CRICHTON

What else is new? He can cope for a few more minutes. I want to get the rest of the MACOs into Shuttlepod Two to provide the away team with backup. Especially once I have a talk with this Sadapa Prime.

EVORI

Captain, are you sure this is a fight you want to pick?

CRICHTON

Without a doubt. You got a problem with that, Ensign?

EVORI

No sir. Just wanted to make sure we were committed.

ISAACS

Or should be.

CRICHTON

Let's get moving people. We have a world to save.

SOUND: Transition music.

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

SOUND: Tactical alert claxons and a door opens.

CRICHTON

Progress report.

SOUND: Door closes.

WESTLAKE

Are you really planning on overthrowing the lawful government of this planet?

EVORI

Translations have been downloaded Captain.

CRICHTON

Get me the dictator on the horn. Punch a signal through if you have to.

WESTLAKE

I guess I'll take that as a yes.

SOUND: A faint blast against the ship's armor.

CRICHTON

How long has that been going on?

WESTLAKE

About three minutes.

ISAACS

It's the other ships in orbit attacking us. Nothing to concern yourself with.

CRICHTON

Why isn't it doing more damage? They blew away the Thistlegorm.

ISAACS

The Thistlegorm was a cargo ship, not an NX starship... and *they* weren't prepared.

EVORI

I've got a signal, Captain, with visual.

CRICHTON

Good. Put him on the view screen. I want to look him in the eye.

SOUND: Main screen activated.

*SADAPA PRIME*

*I don't know whom you think you are you <untranslatable> progeny of a <untranslatable>, but you have just made a deadly mistake! We will hunt your loved ones down and you will dread the moment you heard the name Isapi! You will...*

CRICHTON

*You* will shut the hell up. I'm Captain Matthew Crichton of the Earth Starfleet Vessel Challenger, and your reign of terror is officially at an end. And, for the record, I already dread having heard of your planet, so your work is already done.

*SADAPA PRIME*

*My fleet will find your <untranslatable> home world and we will level it beneath our boot heel!*

CRICHTON

You just don't know when to shut up, do you? Listen buddy, you've already bit far more trouble than you know, and the more you run your mouth, the deeper your getting.

*SADAPA PRIME*

*We will enslave your women and hunt your men for sport!*

CRICHTON

OK, big mouth. Take a breath and check in with your “*fleet*” on their progress. They’ll tell you - unless they’re afraid to reveal the truth - that your weapons are useless, much like yourself.

SADAPA PRIME

*I...*

CRICHTON

I said *shut up*. Now you may be the big fish in this little pond, but you went and crossed the line when you attacked one of our ships and stole weapons.

SADAPA PRIME

*We have no knowledge of what you are talking about.*

CRICHTON

Fine, play your way, but the fact of the matter is that those missing weapons led us to your door, and drew your activities to my attention. I’ve never dealt well with bullies; I like to put them in their place. So, here’s what you’re going to do to keep me happy. *You’re* going to step down from power, and your people will get to hold a free election, and they will get to negotiate for peace. By the little bit I saw today, they’re going to want someone new calling the shots; someone who won’t send people off to blow themselves up. Once we’re sure that your planet can play nice with your neighbors, we’ll reclaim our stolen weapons and go back about our business.

SADAPA PRIME

*What gives you the right to interfere?*

CRICHTON

By your rules, we have the right because we have the bigger guns and we can. Theoretically, we have an obligation because of our advancements to look out for the little guy and make sure there’s justice in this universe. But truth be told, you made my bad day worse, and I can do something about you.

SOUND: Transition music.

## ACT III

**SCENE 1** – *ENTER INT.: Bridge – The Challenger*

V.O.:

CRICHTON

Captain's log: January 14, 2157. We've spent the past three weeks in orbit around Isapi Three, working with the inhabitants to establish a new ruling body after the removal of their dictator, Sadapa Prime. After investigating the planet's few remaining historical records – apparently, Sadapa had most of them destroyed upon rising to power – we have come to the realization that Sadapa is the latest in line of dictators. These people have been under fascist rule for the past millennium. I have stationed Major Goldman and his MACOs on the planet as a peacekeeping force until the election of the new ruling body can be held, but we have run into continual difficulties as, to many of the residents of this planet, freedom is both an alien and frightening concept. Likewise, we are working on diplomatic relations with its neighboring planets and former victims, which add complications as they are unwilling and unable to believe change is on the horizon and to learn how to forgive and forget. Meanwhile, we have yet to recover the missing missiles and Starfleet is less than happy we have devoted so much time to this mission. My own belief is that the missiles were disposed of before Sadapa was removed from power to hide his transgressions.

EVORI

Captain, Goldman is calling from the capitol.

CRICHTON

Put him through.

SOUND: Communicator chirp.

CRICHTON

What's going on, Major?

*MAJOR GOLDMAN*

*The militia is coming along, but opposition is on the rise. For some unknown reason, there are people in this God-forsaken dustbowl that actually want Sadapa in power.*

CRICHTON

A man like Sadapa doesn't rise to power without supporters. With him gone, they lose their influence.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

*Well, between the midnight raids and the sniper attacks, they're not making it easy. We also lost two more men to a raiding party last night.*

CRICHTON

I'm extremely sorry to hear that, Major. *<beat>* I'll work on putting together letters to their families.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

*We all knew the risks when we signed up, but they'll still be missed, sir.*

CRICHTON

I concur. *<beat>* How goes the local recruitment?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

*About the time we've talked a dozen men into joining the militia, the opposition strikes and drives them all away again. Wouldn't it just be easier to call in Starfleet and have them take over? Maybe we could turn this place into an Earth colony. It would make things a lot simpler to just bring in an established governing body.*

CRICHTON

We didn't come here to conquer, Major. If we bring in more people and take over, it would make us just as bad as they are. No, we're going to do this the right way and help them establish themselves as a race.

FITZGERALD

Sorry for the interruption, Captain, but we have another bogey coming in.

CRICHTON

Got to let you go, Major.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

*Goldman out.*

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

CRICHTON

What is it this time, Lieutenant?

FITZGERALD

Isapi Four has launched what appears to be a crude explosive-filled rocket at Isapi Three. The guidance system is primitive at best. And the propulsion is rudimentary, but it could do some damage if it manages to actually make it through the void and hit the planet.

CRICHTON

Can you tell where on Isapi Four it came from?

FITZGERALD

The Crustarans, sir.

CRICHTON

Evori, raise the Crustaran Prime Minister for me. Mary, take the missile out.

FITZGERALD

Phase cannons are online.

SOUND: Phase cannon fires, followed by explosion.

FITZGERALD

Target destroyed, Captain.

CRICHTON

Good shooting, Lieutenant.

FITZGERALD

I've been getting plenty of practice lately.

EVORI

I've got the Prime Minister, sir.

CRICHTON

Put him on.

SOUND: Communication chirp.

CRICHTON

Prime Minister. We've had this discussion before.

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*Captain. You have no right to interfere in us taking our rightful vengeance.*

CRICHTON

I'll admit that you have a right to be angry, Prime Minister, but you have a right to justice, not revenge. The man responsible for tormenting your people is in custody. All you're going to accomplish by firing off random missiles is hurting innocent civilians, just like what was done to you. Prime Minister, I know you're a good man, and if you actually hurt someone who didn't deserve it, it would tear you up inside. So, for your own sake, stop trying.

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*Your sense of justice is too slow, Captain. Turn Sadapa over to us. We'll make sure he pays for his crimes, and you can keep your hands clean.*

CRICHTON

If I were to turn him over to you, I'd just be as guilty as if I pulled the trigger myself. Trust me, Prime Minister, Sadapa will pay for his crimes, but it must be done legally.

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*Your sense of legalism, Captain, not ours.*

CRICHTON

Look at it this way. If you take him out and execute him, he becomes a martyr to those that still follow him. If he's found guilty of his crimes and punished by his own countrymen, however, it won't be questioned and it will tear down his ego like nothing else can.

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*He will be humiliated?*

CRICHTON

Humiliations galore.

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*That is a noble cause.*

CRICHTON

Does that mean you'll stop attacking Isapi Three?

*CRUSTARAN PRIME MINISTER*

*It does... for now. Provided things go as you say, there may yet be peace between our planets.*

SOUND: Communication disconnect.

CRICHTON (mumbling)

No pressure.

LAO

Beg your pardon, Captain?

CRICHTON

Go down and prep Shuttlepod Two for launch. I want to go planet-side and pay a visit to our prisoner. Evori, you're going to come along, just in case we have translation issues.

LAO

Aye, sir.

SOUND: Footfalls leading to the lift.

WESTLAKE

Captain. I've never quite understood why you've been keeping him down on the planet. After all, wouldn't our brig be a bit more secure?

SOUND: Lift opening and closing.

CRICHTON

Possibly, but then these people wouldn't get the sense of independence that's going to be needed to run things after we're gone. This way, he's their prisoner and their responsibility and they aren't getting one set of dictators in place of another.

WESTLAKE

I suppose so.

FITZGERALD

I'd still feel better if he was encased in transparent aluminum 50,000 miles above his supporters.

CRICHTON

We can't always do things the easy way, Lieutenant. Sometimes we have to teach them how to fish.

SOUND: Transition music.

**SCENE 2 – CUT TO EXT.:** *Jail Landing Pad – Isapi Three*

LAO

Touchdown at the Prison Landing Pad, Captain.

SOUND: Shuttlepod hatch opens.

CRICHTON

Stay with the shuttle, Lieutenant.

LAO

Aye, sir.

CRICHTON

Evori, you're with me.

SOUND: Footfalls move toward jail.

EVORI

Were you expecting a welcoming party?

CRICHTON

No. And it's not so much of a party as a single boy.

SOUND: Footfalls approach quickly in the sand.

GOTHIA

My humblest apologies, sir. I am looking for the new Prime.

CRICHTON

I'm Captain Crichton. And what's your name?

GOTHIA

Gothia, sir. I am honored that you speak to me directly, my lord and master.

CRICHTON

We don't stand much on formality. You can call me Crichton.

GOTHIA

Honored Crichton, I've been sent by my family to bring you this tribute and to join your army.

CRICHTON

Join my army? How old are you?

GOTHIA

Eleven solar cycles, sir. I submit myself to your punishment for waiting so long to volunteer.

CRICHTON

How old were you supposed to be to join up here?

GOTHIA

I was supposed to pledge my loyalty last solar cycle.

CRICHTON

Ten? What's a child supposed to do in the army?

GOTHIA

Whatever you wish, master.

CRICHTON (irritated)

Don't call me that.

GOTHIA (fearful)

Mercy, sir!

CRICHTON (calming)

It's OK, son. Don't worry. I'm not gonna hurt you. I'm not angry with you.

EVORI

Remember, Captain. Change takes time.

CRICHTON

Thanks for the gift, kid, but Starfleet doesn't sign 'em up that young.

GOTHIA

But we have heard of your new army. Don't you require all to join?

CRICHTON

The militia we're forming is voluntary. Nobody gets drafted and there's no way we're letting kids join. Go back to your family and tell them that things are changing. Enjoy your childhood while you can.

GOTHIA

Are you sure, ma.... Crichton?

CRICHTON

Yeah.

GOTHIA (excited)

Thank you, Crichton! Thank you!

SOUND: Footfalls running away quickly.

CRICHTON

Let's get inside. I've got a few words for our guest.

SOUND: Footfalls continue toward jail.

**SCENE 3 – CUT TO INT.:** *Jail Cell – Isapi Three*

SOUND: A door squeaking open.

CRICHTON

You've got a mighty squeaky door there, sheriff.

MAJOR GOLDMAN (imitating John Wayne)

It was that way when I got here, but I reckon it helps us know if someone's coming in unexpectedly.

MAJOR GOLDMAN (normally)

What can we do for you, Captain?

CRICHTON

Just figured I'd come down and see Sadapa, talk with him a bit. See if he's out of his rhetoric phase and willing to hold a civilized conversation.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I could have saved you a trip, Captain. He's as belligerent and uncooperative as the day we threw him in there.

CRICHTON

Is he being treated well?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Captain. Should I be insulted that you would even ask that question?

CRICHTON

Oh, I know you and your men know the rules of the game, but you aren't the only ones around him.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

Doesn't help when you're getting it from all sides, does it sir?

CRICHTON

Can I see him?

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I suppose so. Do you want to go in alone?

CRICHTON

No, Evori'll come in too.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

He wasn't quite what I had in mind. No offense, Evori.

EVORI

None taken, Jake.

CRICHTON

The guy's alone, behind bars. I don't think there's much he can do to me at this point.

MAJOR GOLDMAN

I suppose...

MAJOR GOLDMAN (imitating John Wayne)

...but we'll be right on the other side of this door if you need us.

CRICHTON

Appreciated, Major. Lets go Ensign.

SOUND: Squeaky door opens. Footsteps walk down corridor.

EVORI

Why are we doing this, Captain?

CRICHTON

Which part?

EVORI

Visiting the prisoner.

CRICHTON

Oh, God. I'm getting tired of explaining our presence here.

EVORI

Oh no, sir. I actually understand that one. I just don't know what adding to your frustration by visiting him is going to accomplish.

CRICHTON

Honestly, I'm not real sure myself. I don't know if I'm hoping he'll show some regret, or remorse, or at least acknowledge the fact that he's no longer in charge.

EVORI

Are any of those things going to help you, sir?

CRICHTON

I doubt it.

EVORI

Or are you just searching for some conformation that you've done the right thing?

CRICHTON

Of course not. *<beat>* Do you think I did the right thing?

EVORI

Captain.

CRICHTON

Your right. I guess my ego has taken a bigger blow that I thought.

SADAPA PRIME

So good to hear, Captain. Perhaps you'll realize that you have no right to interfere and return me to my rightful place as master of all I survey.

CRICHTON

And his ever-increasing ego doesn't help matters.

SOUND: SADAPA PRIME laughs.

EVORI

Actually, Captain, his ego is more damaged than anyone I've met in quite a long time.

CRICHTON

He sure covers it well.

EVORI

No he doesn't sir. Do you remember when we first met him, that first transmission?

CRICHTON

Of course.

EVORI

You called him a bully then, and you nailed it on the head. He enjoyed picking on those that were weaker than himself. It made him feel strong. That strength gave him overconfidence, which made him believe that he could tackle anything that came his way. Then we showed up.

CRICHTON

And showed him something that he couldn't bully or defeat.

SADAPA PRIME

Hmm?

EVORI

Exactly, but he couldn't allow himself to admit it. So he started running off at the mouth, trying to convince himself that he was still superior.

CRICHTON

He was trying to convince himself, not me.

SADAPA PRIME

He's insane! He doesn't know what he speaks!

CRICHTON

He knows better than either of us. It's his job.... part of his job.

EVORI

Does that mean you'll let me start scheduling counseling sessions for the crew?

CRICHTON

I won't go that far.

EVORI

Can't blame a guy for trying.

SADAPA PRIME

You are both insane! When I get out of here, I will personally lead the assault on your world.

EVORI

Worlds, plural. Good luck with that. My homeworld is in the Gamma Quadrant.

SADAPA PRIME

The whatta what?

CRICHTON

There is a much larger universe out there than you can imagine, Sadapa; but, then again, you've been so consumed with trying to make the world revolve around you, it probably never dawned on you that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

EVORI

Well spoken, Hamlet.

CRICHTON

If you're going to steal, always steal from the best.

SADAPA PRIME

What are you two blathering about!

CRICHTON

Nothing that would be of any interest to you. Enjoy your trial, Sadapa. You've earned it.

SADAPA PRIME

I will....

CRICHTON

I think I'm ready to leave now, Ensign. And thank you.

EVORI

My pleasure, Captain.

SOUND: Transition music.

## EPILOGUE

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

EVORI

It took us a total of three months to get a military and political council put together before we left the system. And soon after we found ourselves in the middle of the conflict at Cheron.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

And Starfleet was okay with Crichton dedicating those kinds of resources to something other than the war?

EVORI

Not particularly, but they didn't do anything to stop us either. I like to think that there were enough people higher up that saw what we were doing as a good thing to run interference with those that would have roasted Captain Crichton on a barbeque spit.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

That's an... interesting bit of visualization.

EVORI

A turn of phrase I picked up from Ringo Starkey, back aboard the Potemkin.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

I'm surprised they didn't... roast him. It was pretty blatant interference.

EVORI

Remember, Eli. It was before the Prime Directive. In fact, I strongly believe that it was a contributing factor to its creation.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

So what ended up happening with Isapi?

EVORI

I told you, we put a functional government in place.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

No, I meant in the years that followed. I haven't heard of the Isapi's as members of the Federation.

EVORI

Because they're not. After the collapse of Sadapa's regime, they decided to not pursue space travel beyond their own system. While they know, thanks to us, that there are other races out there, they've chosen not to pursue interaction with them.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

But isn't the system now within Federation space?

EVORI

Yes, but that doesn't mean we forced them to join. It's not our style.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Did they at least achieve peace within their system?

EVORI

Oh, yes. The leaders of all three planets got together and formed a coalition. There are trade agreements in place now and they live quite comfortably together.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Did you ever recover the nuclear missiles?

EVORI

We never found them on Isapi Three. I think, when we entered the system, the ship that had raided the Thistlegorm took off. Probably sold them on the black market.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

But that was the whole reason you got involved.

EVORI

No, it wasn't. It was what drew us to the area, but it wasn't the reason we stayed.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

But those were weapons of mass destruction.

EVORI

Sadapa's men had four hundred thousand tons of conventional explosives, not to mention their antimatter bombs, which they were using against their neighbors long before they ever encountered Starfleet. If those aren't weapons of mass destruction, I don't know what are.

<beat>

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

Well, when you put it that way. <beat> Can I ask how many MACOs were lost?

EVORI

Too many; but then again, one is too many.

ENSIGN GOLDMAN

If that's the case, then why do it? Why get involved if the cost is too high?

EVORI

The cost of war is always high, but it needs to be compared to the cost of not getting involved. Yes, we had to pay for the freedom of those planets with the lives of some of our people, but the natives of those planets were paying that cost long before we got involved. There is a price for everything; we chose to take over the payments and close out the account. If we had done anything less, we wouldn't have had the right to call ourselves a civilized race.

CUT: Ending music and credits.

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