

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

13x04 - "Truth Hurts"

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on characters from the series

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

and on the *Star Trek* tie-in novels
by Pocket Books

TNG 18x04 - "TO KIDNAP A KING"

Worf expresses worry to Counsellor Hegol about Lt Choudhury - he believes she is hiding PTSD under her unflappable surface. Choudhury's search protocols have allowed *Enterprise* to track the courses of several escape vessels, including a Denevan ship with over 2,000 survivors. Their leader Tiernan wants to return to Earth and petition President Bacco, but Admiral Akaar sends *Enterprise* to Alpha Centauri instead. Their governor believes that Starfleet gave up on them during the Borg invasion, and now is expected to take in refugees. He is prepared to pull out of the Federation in protest. Worf confronts Choudhury about her lack of reaction to finding Denevan survivors - she admits that she knew her family would never be among them, as they would have given up their seats to save others. When Crusher calls with an update on the conditions at Pacifica, Picard abducts the inflexible Centauri leader and heads to Pacifica...

TTN 2x04 - "CLEAREST BLUE"

Titan finds an unusual planet completely covered in water, which they nickname Droplet. With Riker and a heavily pregnant Troi staying safe onboard, *Titan's* aquatic Pacifican navigator Aili Lavena spearheads the exploration of this world with no land but a myriad of sub-sentient ocean life. Lavena is determined to prove herself through this important task, as she has a history of irresponsible behaviour - like when she slept with the young cadet Will Riker when he was stationed on Pacifica, an encounter they are both uncomfortable about now. While exploring, Lavena and Pazlar are attacked by stinging jellyfish, but saved by a pod of large chordate creatures. They realise there are sentient lifeforms on this planet after all, aquatic creatures which they nickname Squales. They are expert bioengineers, having bred the many lower species to serve various functions. Suddenly Lavena finds herself immersed in a delicate first contact situation...

VOY 11x04 - "BORDERLINE"

Chakotay contacts Seven through a vision quest, realising that she thinks the Caeliar rejected her as "unworthy". Rather than the decades it would take with conventional warp drive, the Full Circle fleet's trip back to the Delta Quadrant will only

take weeks. Wanting to be sure their new quantum slipstream drives are reliable, they have paused near Deneva. While *Achilles* drops comm relays to keep the fleet in contact with Earth, the Doctor explores his new ship *Galen*, a hospital ship crewed almost completely by holograms, except for Commander Clarissa Glenn and hologram specialist Reg Barclay. Just as they are about to leave Deneva, *Voyager* receives a hail - from Seven and Chakotay. She wants to belatedly take up Captain Eden's offer to join the fleet, with the hope that she can find some leftover Caeliar tech to help with her "problem". Admiral Batiste is not happy about it, but Eden accepts them, and they set course for the Delta Quadrant border...

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. SPACE - CESTUS ORBIT

The yellowish orb of Cestus III (last seen 12x10 "Where the Heart Is") is now surrounded by a similar cloud of refugee ships as Deep Space Nine and Bajor have been.

2 EXT. PIKE CITY - DAY

A modern Federation city, with many shuttles and passenger liners going back and forth.

3 INT. CESTUS GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

YROLLA GARI (human female, 60s) sits at her desk, putting her thumb print on a series of padds. There seems to be a never-ending supply of them. She mutters to herself...

GARI

I liked it better when I was
lieutenant governor. Plenty of
power, almost no paperwork.

LUCY (o.s.)

Minister, you can't -

LIN (o.s.)

I need to see the governor!

Gari looks up from her padds to see one of her ministers, LIN (human male, 40s), barging into her office despite the best efforts of Gari's secretary LUCY (human female, 30s).

GARI

(sigh)

What is it this time, Lin?

LIN

There's a refugee ship, Governor.

GARI

Lin, we're a designated refugee
planet. There's supposed to be

refugee ships. That this is a surprise to my transport minister does not inspire confidence.

LIN

But this one isn't on the list.

GARI

What do you mean?

LIN

(brandishes padd)

I mean, I'm holding the list right here, and this ship isn't on it.

GARI

What ship is it?

LIN

An Andorian vessel, the *Kovlessa*. The captain's name is zh'Ranthe, and she says she was supposed to go to Zalda but they were refused.

GARI

So they came here? Why?

LUCY

Or why not just stay on Andor?

LIN

They're not from Andor, they're from Alrond, a colony in their system. The Borg wiped it out on their way to the homeworld, but Andor has its own problems, and Zalda turned them away. And the reason I know all this is that I just got an earful from Captain zh'Ranthe on the subject. I told her we weren't expecting her and didn't have anywhere to put her, and she insisted I speak to you.

GARI

Rita, put a call through -

LUCY
My name's Lucy, ma'am.

GARI
Really?

LUCY
Yes, ma'am.

GARI
Was Rita the last one?

LUCY
That was Yvonne, ma'am.

GARI
Right, well anyway Lucy, put a
call through to this ship -

LIN
The *Kovlessa*.

GARI
And tell this Captain Zerelli -

LIN
zh'Ranthe.

GARI
Right, her - and tell her that
Governor Gari wishes to speak with
her. And then put a call through
to Djinian at the Palais. We're
stretched to the limit here, and I
want to know why the hell Zalda
isn't doing their part.

LUCY
Straight away, Governor.

Lucy leaves the room. Lin starts to do so as well, but -

GARI
Lin, you're not going anywhere. We
need somewhere to put these folks.

LIN
(shouts)
There is nowhere, Governor!

GARI
You're shouting, Lin.

LIN
(calmer)
There is nowhere to put them,
Governor. We're at capacity.

GARI
I heard you the first time. And it
doesn't matter - they need us, and
we're taking them in.

LUCY (o.s.)
I have Captain zh'Ranthe, ma'am.

Gari taps a control on her desk, and a large wall SCREEN
lights up to reveal an Andorian *zhen* in civilian clothing,
eyes bloodshot and antennae limp - ZH'RANTHI.

GARI
Captain, I'm Governor Yrolla Gari
of Cestus Three. My transport
minister has told me your story.
I assume you're aware that any
refugees from the Andor sector
should have gone to Zalda.

ZH'RANTHI (screen)
(exasperated)
We did! I apologise for the
imposition, Governor, but we were
told in no uncertain terms that
Zalda was not taking any refugees.
And now your minister there is
saying the same thing.

GARI
I'm sorry Captain, but we're at
capacity right now. We'll do what
we can, but it won't be much.

ZH'RANTHI (screen)
We don't need much, Governor. Put us on your polar ice caps, most of us are Andorians, we'll be fine.

GARI
That wouldn't be safe - hold on, Lin, what about the stadiums?

LIN
We've been using Ruth Field as a supplementary hospital, and both New Wrigley and Paige Field are being used as processing centres.

GARI
That still leaves seven. Pick one that suits Captain zh'Ranthe's needs and send the *Kovlessa* there.

(to screen)
Captain, these are outdoor arenas, open but enclosed. The baseball season was supposed to start last month, but we postponed it for obvious reasons. I can't promise it'll be all that comfortable -

ZH'RANTHI (screen)
Governor, this ship is designed to carry fifty, and it's currently carrying four-hundred twenty-two. After all these weeks, open air is exactly what we need. Thank you.

GARI
You're welcome, Captain. Minister Lin will handle the details.

zh'Ranthe nods her acceptance, and the line drops.

GARI
Get to work, Lin.

LIN
Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

Lin leaves, and Gari shouts through the open door...

GARI

Lisa, I need you to put a call
through to the Palais.

Lucy pokes her head in the door...

LUCY

I already did, ma'am.

GARI

You did?

LUCY

You did tell me to, ma'am.

GARI

God, I did tell you to, didn't I?
I'm losing it.

LUCY

Then this probably isn't the best
time to remind you about the press
conference in fifteen minutes?

GARI

(sigh)

Yep, definitely liked it better
when I was lieutenant governor.

Off Gari's deflated exhaustion...

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

4 EXT. SPACE

The Vesta-class USS *Aventine* sits calmly in space. Its rear shuttle bay doors open, and the runabout *Seine* emerges. It flies towards us, and as it passes us we TURN with it...

...revealing the EARTH below, with more shuttle traffic moving back and forth all the time. The *Seine* heads down.

5 INT. RUNABOUT - COCKPIT

Captain EZRI DAX sits in the passenger seat, watching the view out of the window while a pilot from the *Aventine*, Benzite female MARDRAL, flies the ship. She is wearing the usual Benzite breathing tubes, and fingering them absently.

DAX

You know, Ensign, I could have taken this trip by myself. I do have piloting experience.

MARDRAL

I know, Captain. I also know that Commander Bowers would strip me of what little rank I have if I let you do that. You are the captain. Flying runabouts is not your job, not even for this mission.

Dax notices Mardral still worrying at her breathing tubes.

DAX

Mardral... I know we don't know each other very well.

MARDRAL

Understandable, Captain. I did only come on board last month, and the *Aventine* has a crew of seven-hundred-and-fifty. I would never expect you to know everyone.

DAX

That's not my point. I was going to say, we don't know each other very well, so you've no reason to take my advice. But I think you'd be better off if you just gave her an answer.

MARDRAL

(turns, shocked)

How did you know?

DAX

(points)

You've got half a pledge stone on that breather, and it's the half that means you've been approached. The half that means you said yes is still empty, and you've been worrying at it since you sat down.

MARDRAL

I just don't know if I'm ready.

DAX

Well, you put the stone on in the first place. Seems to me you think it's worth a shot. Besides, I know that who Benzites breed with and who they marry aren't necessarily the same thing, so it's not like you'd be pledged for life.

MARDRAL

That's true. Thanks, Captain.

DAX

You're welcome.

VOICE (comm)

Palais control to USS *Seine*. You are cleared to proceed to your assigned docking slot.

MARDRAL

Acknowledged, Palais control.

6 **EXT. EARTH - PARIS - DAY**

The CLOUD COVER clears before the *Seine*, and reveals...

PARIS below, specifically the PALAIS DE LA CONCORDE, the centre of government for the entire Federation. The 15-storey cylindrical building straddles the Champs Elysées, with the runabout's own namesake flowing nearby.

The *Seine* settles down right onto the roof of the Palais, a dedicated shuttle pad with swarms of security waiting.

7 **INT. RUNABOUT - COCKPIT - DAY**

Dax looks a bit anxiously out of the windows.

MARDRAL

Whew. A docking slot right on the roof of the Palais itself. What's this all about?

DAX

I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to answer that, Ensign. You'll have to remain here, though.

MARDRAL

Understood, sir.

The truth is, Dax doesn't *know* what this is all about. She gets up from her seat and opens the runabout hatch, heading out to greet the waiting security officers...

8 **INT. FEDERATION PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - DAY**

Dax sits, quietly stunned at the high company - president BACCO behind her desk with Paris behind her, plus Adm AKAAR to Dax's right and chief of staff PIÑIERO to Dax's left.

BACCO

The admiral here speaks very highly of you, Captain Dax. I believe your ship is currently engaged in relief efforts?

DAX

That's correct, ma'am. Since the *Aventine* is one of the few ships with a working slipstream drive, we've been using it to ferry food and supplies - quickly.

BACCO

Including to several Romulan colonies, if I'm not mistaken?

DAX

Yes, ma'am.

(glance to Akaar)

I was told the aid we've been giving the Romulans ever since Shinzon's coup was to continue, despite... recent events.

AKAAR

The relief will continue, Captain, but another ship will be taking over the task. I need the *Aventine* for a different mission.

DAX

...I see.

Piñiero leans across Bacco's desk and works some controls.

PIÑIERO

This is a recording of an emergency council session which took place yesterday.

A translucent HOLOVID appears in the space over Bacco's desk. It reveals the FEDERATION COUNCIL CHAMBER, last seen in 10x11 "Harmony". Cut to reactions as needed.

9 HOLOVID - INT. FEDERATION COUNCIL CHAMBER

Bacco herself is standing at the podium, with her regular bodyguard WEXLER visible behind. The room is only half-filled with councillors, and the highest tiers occupied by reporters. A session is already in progress...

BACCO

The podium recognises Councillor
Djinian of Cestus Three.

A dark-skinned human woman, DJINIAN, in comparatively drab dress (but then this is an emergency session), gets up from her seat and walks down to the shared floor.

DJINIAN

With the podium's permission, I would like to play the recording previously submitted. It is an exchange between Zaldan orbital control and the Andorian vessel *Kovlessa*, taken two weeks ago.

BACCO

Podium grants permission.

Djinian nods to a functionary, and the chamber fills with the recorded voices of Captain zh'Ranthe and a ZALDAN.

ZH'RANTHI (comm)

Zaldan orbital control, this is the *Kovlessa*. We have refugees from Alrond, requesting permission to take orbit and begin transport.

ZALDAN (comm)

Permission denied, *Kovlessa*.

ZH'RANTHI (comm)

Zalda, your world is the official designated planet for refugees in this sector.

ZALDAN (comm)

Permission denied. Go elsewhere.
Zaldan orbital control out.

There is consternation around the room, but only one seat has its light on to be recognised - MOLMAAN the Zaldan.

BACCO

The podium recognises Councillor
Molmaan of Zalda.

Molmaan stomps down to the floor, confronting Djinian. The mostly human-looking male is scarlet with rage.

MOLMAAN

Zalda will not allow such lies to be told! I am outraged that such falsehoods are being broadcast in open council! This insult cannot be tolerated!

With that, Molmaan throws up his webbed hands and stomps off the floor towards the exit. Nobody expected that.

BACCO

Councillor! Please come back so -

MOLMAAN

Zalda will not be part of a Federation of liars!

And he stomps out of the council chamber altogether. Bacco is rather stunned, and takes a moment to clear her throat.

BACCO

The councillor from Zalda has yielded the floor, without any explanation for the recording.

DJINIAN

In light of this, Madam President, I move that Zalda be stricken from the refugee list until such time as its reasons for refusing the *Kovlessa* can be determined.

The recording PAUSES...

10 **BACK TO SCENE**

Dax sits back, absorbing what she has heard.

PIÑIERO

The councillor from Bolarus seconded, and the motion was carried - unanimously.

BACCO

As you heard, Captain, Zalda is threatening to withdraw from the Federation over this. Now between you and me, the Zaldans have been a pain in my ass since day one. Their insistence on truth in every instance, as if they never even heard of tact, is not conducive to good politics in my opinion. But we need them. The Federation cannot fall apart, not now. We need unity, we need a place to send refugees, and Zalda is one of the most important trade routes between us and the Klingons.

DAX

What do you need from me?

BACCO

We need the *Aventine*, and quite frankly we need Dax. Admiral Akaar has shown me your file, and it's very impressive - three-hundred years of serving the Federation, as a diplomat, a scientist and a politician. We'll need all that.

AKAAR

Aventine will set course for Zalda immediately. Councillor Molmaan returned there after leaving the council chambers yesterday. It will be your task to persuade him to return to Earth. Meanwhile, your crew will investigate all the circumstances surrounding this unfortunate series of events.

DAX

One question...

(off Bacco's nod)

Why was the Cestus councillor the one to bring this up in session?

PIÑIERO

That's where *Kovlessa* went after they were turned away from *Zalda*.

DAX

That's a pretty long journey.

BACCO

And they weren't very happy when they got there. Given that the current governor is my former lieutenant governor, *Gari* called *Djinian*, and *Djinian* called me.

DAX

In the hope that a personal touch would speed things along.

BACCO

Precisely. Alright, Captain, best be on your way. I'll make sure the *Aventine* is provided with all the data we have on the situation.

DAX

(stands)

Thank you Madam President, Admiral
- I'll let you know how I get on.

AKAAR

Dismissed, Captain.

Dax nods formal acknowledgment to all present, then heads for the door (which is opened by Agent Wexler). As she strides confidently forwards...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

9 EXT. SPACE

Aventine zooms through space at normal warp.

10 INT. AVENTINE - CONFERENCE ROOM

As seen in 12x14 "Duty Calls" *et al.* Dax sits at the head of the table, nearest the bridge, with first officer SAM BOWERS to her right, science officer GRUHN HELKARA to her left, and counsellor SUSAN HYATT also present.

The windows on either side of the table reveal the stars at warp. Helkara accesses a display on the table, and with a gesture of the hand, he casts the display up into a HOLOVID hovering over the table. Helkara points to demonstrate.

HELKARA

First impressions are that the recording is genuine. Embedded transponder signals correspond to the Andorian civilian transport vessel *Kovlessa* and the Zaldan orbital control station.

DAX

Fair enough. But you said first impressions, so keep digging.

HELKARA

Fully intend to, Captain.

DAX

Alright, now Curzon met Molmaan several years ago at the Altair conference, but to be honest I don't remember a lot about it.

BOWERS

Really? Molmaan seemed pretty memorable to me, if that clip from the council is anything to go by.

DAX

Well, the conference had an open bar. But anyway, I'm going to need a refresher on Zalidan culture before I talk to him again.

HYATT

The main thing to remember is that they despise falsehoods of any kind. They are blunt to a degree most other cultures would find appalling. It's not arguing for arguing's sake, like Tellarites. It's just that the very idea of being dishonest for any reason is repugnant to them. Even polite compliments are extremely taboo.

BOWERS

And that's exactly what smoothes the way in most other diplomatic situations.

HYATT

It was a hell of a job getting them to join the Federation in the first place, given that all their previous contacts with aliens had convinced them they were the only sane people in the galaxy.

DAX

Which means it doesn't take much for them to change their minds.

HYATT

Right. On the other hand, their dedication to honesty does mean there's almost no crime on Zalida.

DAX

What's our ETA?

HELKARA

At current speed, first thing tomorrow morning.

DAX

Alright then - see you all bright
and early. Dismissed.

Helkara and Hyatt get up and head out, but Bowers remains
behind. Dax notices the unhappy grinding of her XO's jaw.

DAX

Something to say, Commander?

BOWERS

(deep breath)

Just that I'm wondering why we got
this mission at all. It feels like
a waste of *Aventine's* abilities.

DAX

'Waste' might be a strong word...

BOWERS

Maybe. But this Zaldan thing, it's
a political issue, surely, not the
kind of mission one of the fastest
ships in the fleet should get.

(gesture at window)

We have slipstream drive and we're
not even using it. The relief runs
may not have been an exploration
mission, but at least we were
helping people in need. Looking
into a diverted refugee ship and a
councillor's petty tantrum seems,
well, beneath us. Sorry, Captain.

DAX

That's alright, Sam. Would it help
to tell you that these orders come
direct from the Palais?

BOWERS

The Palais? As in... the Palais?

DAX

From the President herself, though
Admiral Akaar was in the room too.

BOWERS

I guess it must be important then,
if they're hopscotching the chain
of command like that.

DAX

Nice mixed metaphor. Look, nothing
was said out loud... but I have a
feeling that they have a feeling
something else is going on here,
something bigger than a diverted
refugee ship. So... Zalda it is.

They both sit pondering, gazing at the still-present
holovid displaying the *Kovlessa* recording...

11 EXT. SPACE

Aventine continues to zoom through space at normal warp.

12 INT. AVENTINE - CORRIDOR

Dax walks down the corridor, rolling her shoulders and
stretching out a crick in her neck at the end of a long
day. But as she passes a pair of heavy double doors, she
pauses in surprise, because she can hear...

...MUSIC, a live performance going on nearby. Stepping up
to the double doors, she stretches up on her toes to peer
through the round windows set into them, and sees...

THROUGH THE WINDOWS

...the CREW LOUNGE, with a healthy portion of the crew all
in off-duty clothing, all just sitting and enjoying the
live music. There is no formal stage - people just got out
their instruments where they were and started playing.

BACK TO SCENE

Dax steps away from the door, unsure if she should enter.
It is clearly an informal occasion, she doesn't want the
captain's presence to spoil their fun. But she decides to
hell with it, and strides on in. The door opens...

13 INT. AVENTINE - CREW LOUNGE (CONTINUOUS)

...revealing the expansive, multi-level crew lounge with the huge picture windows, last seen in 12x01 "Godspeed". The gathered musicians are basically jamming, improvising the music on the spot. The players include:

SPON, a three-armed, three-legged Triexian female, playing a three-level organ with curved, Möbius-strip keyboards

KANDEL, a bald-headed female Deltan playing a long ten-stringed sitar-like instrument laid across her lap

CONSTANTINO, a human female who is plucking at a standard acoustic guitar

NAVOK, the terrifyingly tall and thin Vulcan engineer (12x21 "Friendly Fire"), with his *ka'athyra* Vulcan lyre

RIORDAN, the human male jack-of-all-trades ensign (12x15 "Ghost Ship"), who has one of those roll-out flexi-pianos

As the music winds to a close, security chief LONNOC KEDAIR finally notices Dax's arrival and jumps to her feet.

KEDAIR
Captain on deck!

DAX
Oh for pity's sake - everyone at ease. I was just coming in to see what all the fuss was about.

RIORDAN
Just having ourselves a little jam session, Captain.

DAX
Well, don't stop on my account.

Dax moves into the crowd, takes a spare seat next to Kedair and Hyatt, who both settle back into their own seats.

RIORDAN
Anybody know "Crossroad Blues"?

CONSTANTINO

I do.

SPON

We can fake it.

The quintet start fudging their way into the classic blues number, Constantino taking the lead on guitar and hesitant VOCALS. Dax subtly gets the attention of a waiter, whispers a drink order into their ear, and the waiter scuttles off.

CONSTANTINO

(singing)

I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above, have mercy
Save me if you please

Standing at the crossroad
I tried to flag a ride
Standing at the crossroad
I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me
Everybody passed me by

The waiter brings Dax's drink; she nods her thanks. Then she leans closer to Kedair, speaking low...

DAX

I can appreciate yours and Sam's preference for formality on the bridge, Lonnoc, but I don't think it applies in the crew lounge.

KEDAIR

Up to you, Captain.

DAX

Nice to see Ensign Constantino doing better, though.

HYATT

She's not. She's been acting as if nothing's wrong.

Worried, Dax goes back to watching Constantino sing, as does almost everyone else in the room:

CONSTANTINO

(singing)

Standing at the crossroad
Rising sun going down
Standing at the crossroad
Rising sun going down
I believe to my soul
I'm sinking down

I went to the crossroad
I looked east and west
I went to the crossroad
I looked east and west
I didn't have nobody
In my distress

The song winds to a close, and looking around the room, it is clear that the lyrics have had an effect, not least on Constantino herself. After a heartfelt round of applause, the young ensign picks up her guitar and stands aside.

As the other musicians go on to the next song, Constantino approaches Hyatt. Dax can see that her eyes are wet.

CONSTANTINO

Counsellor, do you have a minute?

HYATT

Of course, Erin. Let's go.

Hyatt and Constantino head out of the lounge. Dax is glad to see the ensign getting the help she needs.

KEDAIR

Good of you to come, Captain.

DAX

I wasn't sure I should. I didn't want to make everyone self-conscious. But I'm glad I did. Music has a wonderful way of bringing everyone together.

KEDAIR

(gently probing)

I think we could all use a little catharsis in the circumstances.

DAX

I agree. I know my losses weren't as bad as other people's. Ensign Constantino wasn't as lucky as me. But the specifics don't matter so much as that it's a shared trauma.

KEDAIR

And it will do them good to see their captain sharing the same need for recovery.

DAX

I hope so.

(knocks back drink)

Well! Early start. I'm off to bed.

KEDAIR

Goodnight, Captain. I'm gonna stay a bit longer and be sure everyone stumbles back to their cabin okay.

Dax nods her pleasure - the security chief looking after her charges in more ways than one - and heads out.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

14 EXT. SPACE

Aventine zooms through space at normal warp.

15 INT. AVENTINE - BRIDGE

Dax sits in the command chair, chewing her cheek as she ponders the situation. Bowers is at her right hand...

BOWERS

Helm - ETA to Zalda?

The Bolian lieutenant THARP replies from the helm station.

THARP

We'll drop out of warp in two minutes, Commander, then it'll be five minutes to the planet.

DAX

It still doesn't make sense.

BOWERS

What doesn't, Captain?

DAX

Zalda knows they can't just refuse to take refugees without facing consequences. Why take the risk?

BOWERS

Maybe it's just a snit. Screwing around and wasting our valuable time. Counsellor Hyatt said they were difficult.

DAX

So did Bacco. But Susan also said it's not about being difficult *per se*. Molmaan stormed out because he thought he was being lied to.

BOWERS

But what about the recording? It's pretty damning evidence they did do what they're being accused of.

DAX

And everyone's willing to believe it because it's just what Zaldans do. Even if it makes no sense.

BOWERS

(off-hand)

Plus of course, it's Bacco's own homeworld that's being hit with the overflow of refugees.

That grabs Dax's attention - Bowers has hit on something.

DAX

(following
the thought)

Which would make her own attitude towards Zalda more aggressive, and less likely to properly examine their motives - especially since she has about four-hundred other things to worry about right now.

BOWERS

(intrigued now)

You think someone's deliberately playing them against each other?

Now that the suggestion is out there, Dax can't help but consider it. Lt Tharp speaks up...

THARP

Dropping out of warp in five...

16 **EXT. SPACE - ZALDA SYSTEM**

A standard star system, with its central star far in the distance and a planet somewhat closer.

After a moment, *Aventine* drops out of warp and settles into standard impulse speed.

17 INT. AVENTINE - BRIDGE

The huge IMAX-style viewscreen shows the Zalda system.

THARP

On approach to Zalda now.

DAX

Mirren, hail the Zaldan orbital control station.

The ops manager, MIRREN, taps buttons, then nods to Dax.

DAX

Zalda orbital control, this is the Starfleet vessel USS *Aventine* on a diplomatic mission from the Federation Council. Captain Ezri Dax requests an audience with Councillor Molmaan immediately.

BOWERS

They probably won't even respond.

MIRREN

They're responding, Captain.

Bowers rolls his eyes. Dax smirks, then nods to Mirren. The same voice we heard in the council recording barks out.

ZALDAN (comm)

Aventine, you are not welcome in Zaldan space. Leave now.

The line drops. This time Bowers is smug, while Dax scowls.

DAX

I am not giving up that easily. Tharp, maintain approach. Mirren, open the line up again.

(off Mirren's nod)

This is Captain Dax. I am here on official business from the Palais de la Concorde on Earth, and I'm here to see Councillor Molmaan.

This is a formal diplomatic visit,
and if you refuse it, I will have
to report to President Bacco that
Zalda has declared itself an enemy
of the Federation. Which, by the
way, will also make you an enemy
of the Klingon Empire, and I hear
they're looking for new worlds.

No response. Dax does the cut-throat gesture to Mirren.

THARP

We're approaching the planet,
Captain. Should I enter orbit?

BOWERS

We can't. We don't have permission
and, more to the point, we don't
have a clear flight path. We could
disrupt their orbital traffic,
maybe even cause a crash.

MIRREN

Getting a visual response from the
Councillor's office, Captain.

DAX

On screen.

Dax stands and straightens her uniform; the viewscreen
changes to show MOLMAAN in a Zaldan government office.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Dax? You were Curzon Dax?

DAX

Two hosts ago, yes, Councillor.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Why are you here? Do you bear an
apology from the President?

DAX

I bear about a hundred questions
from the President before an
apology gets on the table.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Then let me ask you a question.
Are you insulting me once again by
lying, or are you really so stupid
as to believe that the Federation
will attack Zalda when we have so
many refugees on our world?

Dax glances to Bowers, both equally confused.

DAX

You have refugees?

MOLMAAN (screen)

Of course we have refugees! What
possible reason would we have for
refusing them?

DAX

I don't know, but the Council had
some fairly compelling evidence.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Lies!

DAX

Were they? You didn't exactly go
out of your way to refute them.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Lies are lies - they are not to be
tolerated!

DAX

Oh cut that out, Molmaan. You've
been looking for an excuse to back
out of the Federation for years.

MOLMAAN (screen)

I do not deny I have advocated
secession, as I find the tiresome
prevarication of other species to
be a tremendous irritation. But I
do not believe now is the proper
time, not after such a major

crisis - and I cannot believe that anyone else would believe that of us. That we are being lied to is the only other explanation.

DAX

Like I said, Councillor, they have evidence. Maybe it was faked, but if it was, it's a damn good fake. Now, if you ask me, your best bet is to go back to Earth and talk to President Bacco and the Council. Straighten this mess out, before it gets any worse.

Molmaan stews for a long while, considering his options.

MOLMAAN (screen)

What assurances do I have that I will not be lied to again?

DAX

None whatsoever. What I can assure you is that you'll be listened to - but you have to be willing to actually talk first.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Why were we not listened to in the first place?

DAX

Most likely because Cestus Three bore the brunt of your apparent refusal to take refugees. You know President Bacco better than I do, and I know how important her home world is to her. Whoever set this up did it on purpose, and knew both how the President would react to Cestus Three's involvement, and how you would react to something you knew was a lie.

Another long pause as Molmaan considers Dax's arguments.

MOLMAAN (screen)

I will return to Earth. I will speak to the rest of the Council and to the President. I do not promise that we will forgive this insult, but I do promise that I will consider it.

DAX

That's all we ask, Councillor. Thank you.

MOLMAAN (screen)

Bacco was wise to send you, Dax. You are a creature of truth - you do not disguise your passions or your failings. If you believe this to be a ruse, then I am willing to also believe it may be so.

DAX

(genuinely touched)

I appreciate that, Councillor. One last thing - the refugees...?

MOLMAAN (screen)

They may come here. We will not turn away people in need. We only refused your vessel because you are not in that manner of need.

DAX

Thanks again, Councillor. Have a safe trip back to Earth.

Molmaan drops the signal without niceties.

BOWERS

That went better than I expected.

DAX

Let's hope so. Tharp, take us back out of the system. Mirren, send a message to Admiral Akaar at Starfleet Command that Zalda is open for business again.

THARP / MIRREN

Aye, Captain.

We feel the vessel manoeuvre at impulse to go back the way it came. Dax returns to her seat, still pondering...

DAX

Of course, that still leaves us with a seemingly genuine recording from Zalda control. Any updates from Helkara?

BOWERS

Not yet. The mystery deepens.

An ALERT on Bowers' console - he turns to check it.

BOWERS

Interesting...

DAX

What is?

BOWERS

Ever since you mentioned your suspicions, I've had the computer scanning the news feeds constantly for certain relevant search terms. And it's just flagged up a police report... from Cestus Three.

DAX

Interesting. Go on...

BOWERS

It says here that one Altheria zh'Ranthe, captain of the Andorian civilian transport *Kovlessa*, was arrested by Cestus authorities. Someone checked the casualty lists out of Andor, and they showed that Captain Altheria zh'Ranthe... is dead. Killed by the Borg when they blew up her transport ship.

DAX

Then who is on that recording?

BOWERS

Unknown. But whoever she is, she's currently being held in custody by the Johnson City PD on Cestus.

Dax can feel the mystery unfolding before her eyes, so she makes a quick decision.

DAX

Tharp, change of plans. Set a new course for Cestus Three... and I am authorising use of the slipstream drive.

THARP

(excited)

Yes, sir.

DAX

Commander Bowers, please compose a message for Governor Gari and for the JCPD, explaining that we are on our way, and we would very much like to meet the erstwhile Captain zh'Ranthi when we get there.

BOWERS

Aye, Captain.

Off their shared grins...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

18 EXT. SPACE - SLIPSTREAM CORRIDOR

Aventine zooms through the swirling blue energies of the slipstream corridor, as seen in 12x01 "Godspeed".

19 INT. AVENTINE - BRIDGE

The corridor is also being displayed on the *Aventine's* viewscreen. Dax sits in command, enjoying the view.

DAX

Gotta say, I am not bored with this yet. The part of me that's Torias is on fire right now.

(grin to Bowers)

He had a bad case of what he liked to call new-toy-itis.

THARP

Dropping out of slipstream in five...

DAX

There, you see? Ten minutes to make a journey that took the *Kovlessa* weeks. Makes you wish more ships had slipstream.

Bowers still seems to be in a mood. On the viewscreen, the slipstream corridor dissipates and reveals normal SPACE, the Cestus system as seen previously looming before them.

DAX

Mister Bowers, please alert Cestus control of our arrival. Lieutenant Mirren, please put a direct call through to Governor Gari's office. She should be expecting us.

BOWERS / MIRREN

Aye, sir.

20 INT. CESTUS GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Governor GARI is just as frazzled as before. The wall screen in her office now shows Dax on the *Aventine* bridge.

GARI

Captain Dax? I only just received your message a few moments ago, and you're here already.

DAX (screen)

I apologise for the short notice, Governor, but time is a factor. We're here to follow up on the incident regarding the *Kovlessa*.

GARI

(re padd)

So I see. But I'm a bit confused as to how the arrest of a single transport captain warrants one of Starfleet's finest rushing over here so fast they arrive almost before they left.

DAX (screen)

Our mission comes from the highest authority, Governor, and it was instigated by Cestus Three's own representative on the Council.

GARI

(finally twigs)

Oh, I see. Well in that case, have at it. What do you need from me?

DAX (screen)

Our investigation flagged up a few anomalies, and we're hoping the captain of the *Kovlessa* can help to explain them for us. I believe you have her in custody?

GARI

Johnson City do, yeah. I've barely had chance to look into it myself.

But I can tell you the JCPD won't be happy to hand over a prisoner.

DAX (screen)

I can appreciate their position, ma'am. But since this incident now involves three Federation members - Cestus, Zalda and Andor - the jurisdiction cannot fall to any one of those worlds alone. This has to become a Starfleet matter.

GARI

Sounds reasonable, plus it's one less thing for me to worry about. Done! We'll get the arrangements made, Captain. She'll be ready by the time you make orbit.

DAX (screen)

Much obliged, ma'am. *Aventine* out.

The signal drops, and Gari yells...

GARI

Linda! Get me the Johnson City PD!

21 EXT. SPACE - CESTUS ORBIT

Aventine slips smoothly into orbit around the yellow world, among the many other vessels coming and going.

22 INT. AVENTINE - TRANSPORTER ROOM

The Triexian officer SPON (from the concert) operates the transporter controls, and three figures MATERIALISE on the platform. Two of them are security chief Kedair and deputy ENGLEHORN (human male), both wearing holstered phasers.

Between them, wearing wrist shackles, is the Andorian *zhen* currently called ZH'RANTHI. An unhappy Bowers meets them.

BOWERS

Welcome aboard *Aventine*. I hope you realise you've put lives at risk by dragging us out here.

ZH'RANTHI
I've saved lives! What happened to
innocent until proven guilty?

BOWERS
(holding anger in)
Lieutenant, please escort our
"guest" to the holding cells.

KEDAIR
Aye, sir.

Kedair and Englehorn lead the disgruntled Andorian out.

23 INT. AVENTINE - BRIG

zh'Ranathi stands in the cell, arms folded and distinctly uncooperative as Doctor SIMON TARSES raises a hypospray and brings it to the Andorian *zhen's* arm. She flinches away...

...but Kedair steps close, intimidating. zh'Ranathi submits, although still not happily. Tarses applies the hypospray, draws a vial of blue blood, then puts it away and begins scanning the Andorian with a medical tricorder.

ZH'RANTHI
I object to every part of this,
Lieutenant. You can't make people
prove who they are.

KEDAIR
Reasonable doubt has been raised
about your identity, Captain. The
casualty lists say you're dead.

ZH'RANTHI
Well, obviously those lists are
wrong, aren't they? I'm standing
right in front of you!

KEDAIR
Maybe you are, maybe you're not.
Doctor Tarses will confirm it
either way. Got everything you
need, Doctor?

TARSES

For now. I'll take this all to sickbay and let you know what I find out.

Tarses packs up his equipment and steps out of the cell, heading to the exit. Kedair turns on the force-field and moves to follow Tarses, but zh'Ranthe calls after her...

ZH'RANTHI

I saved four-hundred-plus lives!
Doesn't that count for anything?

Kedair turns back, but instead of being angry, she has taken these words to heart.

KEDAIR

Every life counts, *zha*.

Then she continues on her way out of the room.

24 **INT. AVENTINE - CONFERENCE ROOM**

Back to the conference room. Dax at the head, plus Bowers, Kedair, Tarses and Helkara. The latter has cast another set of records up onto the holo-display for everyone to see.

DAX

To be fair to her, the Borg attack destroyed a lot of Andor's data files. She could be telling the truth that the records are wrong. It's hardly impossible that somebody made a mistake identifying one body out of millions.

BOWERS

Or maybe that's just what she's counting on to cover her tracks.

HELKARA

As I said, it certainly looks at first glance like she's telling the truth. Problem is, she's not. Almost all of it's a lie.

DAX

You're absolutely sure?

HELKARA

Yes, sir. This is a real picture of Altheria zh'Ranthe, but the Kovlessa's flight plan is faked. They never went to Zalda at all.

BOWERS

So the recording was also faked.

HELKARA

(nodding)

It was her voice on her ship, but the Zaldan orbital control's voice was constructed from a sample, and the transponder code was inserted after the fact.

TARSES

And she's not Altheria zh'Ranthe, no matter what she says or what she looks like. Her DNA has been altered using a dangerous drug.

DAX

But she had to know she'd be scanned when she landed on Cestus, that's part of the basic refugee process across the Federation.

TARSES

She had reason to be confident, Captain. On top of the uncertain status of the casualty records, a standard DNA scan does match zh'Ranthe. Unluckily for her, a brand new method of detecting altered DNA was just uploaded to the Starfleet medical database literally the week before the invasion started. It was enough to see through her disguise.

DAX

So can you reverse the process?
Figure out who she was before?

KEDAIR

Already done, Captain. I passed the original DNA profile through the Federation criminal database, since that was too decentralised to be seriously affected by the Borg. We got a positive match.

With a series of gestures, Kedair wipes away Helkara's records from the holo-display and puts up one of her own.

KEDAIR

Torethirala zh'Vres, last seen in Ferengi custody on fraud charges.

BOWERS

Sounds like our friend, alright. But if she was being held by the Ferengi, how come she's out and about with a new face now?

KEDAIR

That's where my information ends, I'm afraid.

DAX

Oh, I think I can get you more than that.

(taps combadge)

Dax to Mirren. Put a call through to starbase Deep Space Nine, for the attention of Ambassador Quark.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

25 EXT. SPACE - CESTUS ORBIT

Aventine is still in orbit of *Cestus*, with its heavy orbital traffic.

26 INT. AVENTINE - BRIG

zh'Ranthe (as we are still calling her for clarity's sake) sits on the cot in the cell. Dax is outside the cell.

DAX

It was a good plan, I have to give you that. And if not for one man reading a casualty report, and happening to notice one name on it, you probably would have got away with it. But just that one little thing going wrong for you, and everything else unravelled.

zh'Ranthe doesn't respond. Dax didn't really expect her to.

DAX

You had no way of knowing that Bacco would send me. Or that I knew Molmaan, or that I'm a close friend of the Ferengi ambassador to Bajor. He tweaked some lobes, and he found out that someone bribed the Ferengi authorities to get you out of jail.

ZH'RANTHI

That's completely legal under Ferengi law.

DAX

Of course it is, but it leaves us with the question of why.

ZH'RANTHI

Why what?

DAX

Why spend such a lot of money for your freedom, then pay for highly dangerous and extremely expensive DNA alterations, buy you a ship, some forged voice prints, and bribe four-hundred-plus refugees to spend weeks on a ship designed for fifty, all to drive a wedge between Zalda and the Federation.

Still no response. Dax strolls amiably back and forth.

DAX

See, it's obvious you're not the one behind all this - you're just the one who made it happen. Can't blame them for taking the money - they lost everything to the Borg. But it's a hell of a lot of money. Even Quark couldn't figure out where it came from. Too many fake accounts and shell corporations. Don't suppose you'd enlighten us?

ZH'RANTHI

Why should I?

DAX

Well, given all the evidence we've gathered against you, the charges aren't misrepresentation anymore - they're fraud and conspiracy. But if you should choose to cooperate by naming your employer, it might help to reduce the sentence.

ZH'RANTHI

I'm not saying anything without proper legal representation.

DAX

(shrug)

Fair enough. We'll just send you back down to Cestus then.

ZH'RANTHI

Wait, what?

DAX

Oh, sorry - you thought you'd be spending your sentence in a nice hi-tech Starfleet brig? I'm afraid we don't have that kind of legal representation on the *Aventine* - and I do want to be sure you get it - so it has to be on Cestus.

ZH'RANTHI

But your security woman said it was a multi-planetary incident, so Starfleet took jurisdiction.

DAX

And that was true at the time. But then we discovered that you never actually went to Zalda, so that counts them out. And since Andor kind of have their own problems right now, they're happy to let Cestus take the case. It is where the crime actually happened. Of course, given the huge number of refugees they're also handling these days, I can't imagine you'll be their highest priority.

(faux concern)

Kind of made your own bed there, I'm afraid.

Dax taps her badge, the door opens, and Kedair strides in.

DAX

Please escort our guest back to the transporter room, Lieutenant. The Johnson City PD are eagerly awaiting her return.

KEDAIR

Aye, Captain.

As Kedair moves to do that, Dax strides confidently out into the corridor. She rather enjoyed that.

27 **EXT. SPACE**

Aventine zooms through space at warp, back the other way.

28 **INT. AVENTINE - BRIDGE**

Dax is back in the command chair, with Bowers, Kedair, Helkara, Mirren and Tharp in their usual places. The giant viewscreen shows the president's office in the Palais, with Bacco herself behind her desk, plus Piñiero and Akaar.

BACCO (screen)

You have my personal thanks for resolving this so fast, Captain.

DAX

We were glad to be of service, ma'am. If I may ask, have you heard from Councillor Molmaan?

PIÑIERO (screen)

In fact, he addressed the Council via subspace while he was still *en route* back to Earth.

DAX

I guess he wasn't lying when he said he thought the Federation ought to stick together.

BACCO (screen)

He was as conciliatory as I think he's ever likely to be, especially once Councillor Djinian presented the new evidence regarding your criminal zh'Vres.

AKAAR (screen)

Please pass on my compliments to your crew, Captain. You've all done well. We may call on your services again in the future.

DAX
I will, Admiral. Thank you.

AKAAR (screen)
Palais out.

The signal drops, and the gathered crew adjust to having just met the president of the entire Federation.

MIRREN
She looks a lot older in person than in her pictures.

DAX
Yeah well, seven thousand Borg cubes will do that to you. But she's a very smart woman.
(off Bowers' look)
I think she knew her judgement might not be too objective where her homeworld was concerned, and I think she suspected someone else knew that too. That's why she brought in the *Aventine* - to gain some distance and perspective.

BOWERS
Well, it worked. I'm... sorry... for questioning the mission.

As the bridge returns to normal around them, Dax leans closer to Bowers, so their junior officers can't hear them.

DAX
Is everything alright, Sam?

Bowers instinctively tenses - the captain called him by his first name on the bridge, and he doesn't like that.

BOWERS
We're on the bridge, Captain.

DAX
I realise that. But there's more going on than just your preference for formality, isn't there?

Opening up is not in his nature, but he makes an effort to relax his shoulders and be honest with his captain.

BOWERS

I think maybe I was just feeling impatient... maybe even guilty. Like there were so many people out there who needed our help, and I wasn't doing enough to help them.

DAX

Have you spoken to Susan?

BOWERS

She's got enough on her plate, I don't want to add to it.

Dax nods quietly and settles back, seeming to leave it there. Bowers relaxes, thinking the torture is over.

DAX

You know... I heard a rumour in the transporter room.

BOWERS

What kind of rumour?

DAX

Chief Spon implied there might be another impromptu jam session in the crew lounge tonight.

BOWERS

A... "jam session"?

DAX

(grin)

Twenty-two-hundred. I'll see you dancing yet, Commander.

Bowers sighs in defeat, while Dax settles happily into her command seat.

29 **EXT. SPACE**

Aventine zooms through space at warp, back the other way.

30 **EXT. JOHNSON CITY - DAY**

A smaller city than the capital, but still identifiably on Cestus Three.

31 **INT. JOHNSON CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

A male human JCPD OFFICER strides down a drab, utilitarian corridor in the local jail. He turns a corner and comes to a simple jail cell, stone with metal bars. Sitting inside it is the Andorian *zhen* formerly known as zh'Ranthe.

She is sitting there looking impatient and embarrassed, but when she sees the officer, she gets to her feet excited.

ZH'RANTHI

Well?

OFFICER

The sergeant has approved your request.

ZH'RANTHI

Thank Uzaveh. Come on, then.

At her beckoning, the officer unlocks the cell, and zh'Ranthe steps out. The officer leads her back down the corridor to a nearby comm unit, and stands there waiting.

She looks pointedly at him - some privacy, please? - and he reluctantly steps back half a dozen paces. Far enough not to overhear, but close enough in case she tries anything.

zh'Ranthe turns back to the comm unit and enters a long, complex code. She waits a while...

...and the screen activates to show a Ferengi female named SEKKI. She is not happy to see the Andorian.

SEKKI (screen)

You! What the *frinx* do you want?

ZH'RANTHI
I'm in jail, Sekki.

SEKKI (screen)
I know exactly where you are. But you needn't expect any help from me. You failed the job I hired you to do, and you got caught. I ought to sue you for malpractice.

ZH'RANTHI
Sekki, come on -

SEKKI (screen)
Don't call me again! I'll find someone I can rely on next time.

The line drops, and zh'Ranathi is stunned. The officer steps forward again, making his point clear.

With nothing else for it, zh'Ranathi goes with him back down the corridor, back into the cell, back onto the cot. As the officer locks the cell, he speaks genuinely...

OFFICER
I'm sorry.

zh'Ranathi is too stunned to respond. Her last, best hope of rescue or leniency is gone. The officer walks away, leaving her in there...

FADE OUT

END OF SHOW