

FADE IN:

INT. SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN - DAY

CORINTH ROWE, a tall and lean black male in his early-30's with chiseled facial features and wearing a jacketed red/black Starfleet uniform with a COMMANDER'S RANK INSIGNIA is breathing quickly, and his eyes are shut.

He is surrounded by REA THOMPSON, an attractive black woman with short, black hair and wearing the same jacketed red/black uniform as Corinth, though hers bears Lt. Commander insignia; PTAT POTARI, a short, stocky Tellarite male carrying a phaser pulse rifle and wearing a blue civilian's shirt, and EGBERT, a Saurian male with purple skin and a uniform similar to the yellow/black uniform worn by Rea, but bearing Ensign rank.

GATCHA (O.S.)

You're not the first man to lose a ship.

Corinth opens his eyes suddenly and turns around.

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - GATCHA ROWE STANDING AT THE BACK DOOR

GATCHA ROWE, a handsome black male in his 60's wearing all-black civilian's clothing, peers at Corinth like a tough father glares at a distressed son.

BACK TO SCENE

Corinth gulps, but doesn't outwardly show his trepidation. He turns around again, and Gatcha is no longer standing in the doorway.

CORINTH

Put the Desperado on autopilot towards its destination, set escape pod auto-coords within three kilometers of my present location and give the order: all hands, abandon ship.

DOUG (O.S.)

Repeat?

CORINTH

All hands...abandon ship.

The OTHER MEMBERS of the away team immediately become sullen as they hear the order.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

DOUG NELLIS, a handsome black male in his early-30's and wearing a jacketed red/black uniform, operates the navigator console within the bridge of an Andorian Kumari Escort.

DOUG
(quietly)
I copy. Computer, broadcast to all
decks-
(shouts)
All hands, abandon ship! I repeat! Head
for the escape pods!

INT. DESPERADO CORRIDOR

The corridors of the Desperado fill with crewmembers scurrying through.

INT. DESPERADO ESCAPE POD CHAMBER

Dozens of Desperado crewmembers pile into moderately-sized ESCAPE PODS.

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS - DAY

ESCAPE PODS launch from the belly of the DESPERADO, an Andorian Kumari Escort, as three ground-to-air missiles strike it.

After launching, all of the escape pods rocket away in the same direction. One pod rockets DIRECTLY TOWARDS THE VIEWER.

EXT. BLACK SCREEN

CORINTH (V.O.)
At 1320 hours, the USS Madrid and the
USS Desperado were deliberately
attacked while in orbit of Sephos, a
pre-warp, class-M planet, by a ship of
unknown origin but believed to be a
military vessel belonging to the
Greater Court of Caliphax's
Three-Hundred-and-Ninth Fleet. With
the exception of six escape pods, the
Madrid was lost with all hands, and the
Desperado was destroyed by
anti-aircraft artillery fired from the
Sephosian surface.

END TEASER

EXT. SPACE

The USS Desperado is in mid-warp.

SUPER: STARDATE 2412, 0630 HOURS

INT. CAPTAIN'S READY ROOM

The ready room has an interior design exact with that of an Andorian Kumari Escort, and Corinth is dressed in 25th century casual-wear as he sits in a plush black office chair and reads from a PADD.

After studying the padd for a few more seconds, he sighs and sets his padd aside.

CORINTH

Computer, transcribe this to audio, starting on page sixteen. Voice and inflection of a Vulcan male.

Corinth then leans back and surveys the items of his ready room: a GOLDEN MODEL OF A AKIRA-CLASS STARSHIP AND A SILVER MODEL OF A DEFIANT-CLASS STARTSHIP.

GAISE (O.S.)

...While myself and the crew of the USS Madrid are honored to be chosen for this assignment and we plan to utilize all diplomatic options during the course of this blockade-

Sitting on his desk is a framed picture of CORINTH IN THE EMBRACE OF A BEAUTIFUL BAJORAN WOMAN WITH MOCHA SKIN (Brazilian in appearance by real-world standards). Corinth picks up the picture and gazes at it.

GAISE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

-I believe it would be logical to have the support of at least one ship, captain, and crew that specialize solely in tactical, investigative, and security-related matters, if only to serve as a deterrent to a violent situation with the Three-Hundred and Ninth Fleet, which may occur as a result of our planned Sephoshian blockade.

Scattered across the walls are framed 21st century movie posters for 'For A Few Dollars More,' 'High Noon,' 'High Plains Drifter,' and 'My Name Is Trinity,' and 'Cowboy Bebop: Knockin' On Heaven's Door.'

GAISE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Commander Corinth Rowe, as your ship and crew fit the criteria for such support in this situation and your crew routinely patrols the Malanga Sector, which neighbors the Enya Sector-

Corinth approaches a tall and wide locker, futuristic in design, and opens its door by pressing his thumb against a FINGERPRINT

LOCK. The fingerprint lock GLOWS GREEN, and Corinth opens the locker. Inside and hanging from a rack is a SLEEK BLACK RED/BLACK JACKET with COMMANDER RANK BARS attached to the chest, a pair of LOOSE BLACK CAPRI PANTS, and a BLACK LEATHER HOLSTER FILLED WITH TWIN METALLIC PHASER PISTOLS.

GAISE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
-I would like to request the
Desperado's presence in the Enya
Sector.

Corinth fixes his attention upon the twin phaser pistols for a moment, but then removes the uniform from the rack and closes the locker.

INT. CAPTAIN'S READY ROOM - LATER

Dressed in his uniform and sitting in his chair, Corinth again reads from his padd.

CORINTH
Computer, location of Lt. Commander
Doug Nellis?

COMPUTER (O.S.)
Lt. Commander Nellis is on duty and on
the bridge.

CORINTH
Send him in.

Corinth stands. A few seconds later, Doug enters, smiles, and throws a salute up to Corinth.

DOUG
Welcome home, Skipper. How was
Organia?

CORINTH
(salutes back)
Wonderfully uneventful as always.
Anything I need to know before I head
out there?

Corinth and Doug drop their salutes.

DOUG
We had an encounter with hostile Gorn
seperatists over Zeralo.

CORINTH
Legitimate seperatists or pirates?

DOUG
We can't exactly go back and ask them;
when we shot all shields down, they
self-destructed rather than accept

capture. It's all in after-action reports sent to Starfleet HQ and to the Desperado's logs. No hull damage incurred.

CORINTH
Regrettable outcome with the hostiles. Anything else?

DOUG
Nothing priority.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Corinth and Doug walk onto the bridge.

DOUG
Captain on the bridge!

Everyone on the bridge rises to attention, and focus is placed on the happy expressions of our principal bridge officers:

LILLITH DECKER, an attractive white blonde female with long hair and a yellow/black jacketed uniform. Lieutenant bars are attached to her uniform.

ELEMUD C'SERRA, the same beautiful Bajoran woman that appeared in the photograph on Corinth's desk. She wears a blue/black jacketed uniform. Unlike the other principal bridge officers, she's blushing, but she's still attempting to maintain a strong military bearing.

Rea stands firm at the tactical console.

CORINTH
At ease.

Corinth's smile grows wider.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Damn, kids. It's good to be home, but it's back to business as usual. I need all senior staff officers in the deck two conference room right now-
(faces Doug)
-lay in coords to Sephos, Enya Sector.

Still standing up, Doug operates the navigator's console.

DOUG
Done.

CORINTH
Warp eight, *andale*.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado pushes into warp, leaving red and white streaks behind it.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Corinth, Elemud, and Rea head for the turbolift door, but Doug and Lilli remain at their consoles.

LILLI

Rea-

(coughs)

I need a tactical officer's opinion on something.

REA

On what?

Lilli points to her console.

LILLI

Come over here and take a look. It'll take awhile.

(faces Corinth)

We'll be right down, Skipper.

DOUG

Yeah, I have to wrap up on something here, sir, but I'll be along.

Rea glances from Lilli to Corinth, and then to Elemud.

REA

Oh, sure I'll help, Lilli. Be down in a second, Captain.

Corinth shrugs.

CORINTH

Hurry along, and page the doc while you're at it.

Corinth and Elemud enter the turbolift, and Lilli and Rea watch them.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Deck Two.

The turbolift doors close.

LILLI

Captain's Log: Today, I made a baby in the turbolift!

Everyone on the bridge laughs.

INT. TURBOLIFT

Corinth and Elemud stand side-by-side in the elevator in a very professional manner...but only for a few seconds. Corinth soon LOCKS EYES with Elemud and she LOCKS EYES upon him; overpowering lust is apparent in both gazes.

ELEMUD

Two-weeks leave on Organia, Skipper.
How was it?

Corinth wraps Elemud tight into his arms and they share an EXTREMELY PASSIONATE KISS. He pushes her against the turbolift wall and kisses her neck, which she closes her eyes and enjoys while gripping his shoulders.

COMPUTER (O.S.)

Deck Two.

Corinth and Elemud immediately separate, and Elemud steps out onto Deck Two when the turbolift doors open.

CORINTH

Missed you, too.

Elemud stands in the corridor and gives Corinth a shy smile while straightening her hair.

INT. DESPERADO COMMAND CONFERENCE ROOM

Corinth is already sitting at the head of the conference room's table and Elemud is sitting a few seats down the table from him, but a new face is also present: M'TAK, a brown-furred Caitian with a mohawked hairstyle and remarkable evergreen eyes. He wears a panelled black/purple intelligence uniform rather than any typical Starfleet uniform.

Doug smiles as he approaches M'Tak, and M'Tak holds up his right hand. Doug slaps it.

DOUG

'Sup, ninja. You've decided to help out with this one?

M'TAK

What can I say, Doug? If you pour over intel sheets long enough, it's either go out on a field mission to cure your cabin fever or claw your own eyes out.

Doug sits ahead of M'Tak near the head of the table, and Lilli settles in directly across from him on the other side of the table. M'Tak locks eyes with Lilli.

LILLI

That'd be a waste of a damn fine set of eyes, Mr. M'Tak.

M'Tak grins; quite literally a sneaky 'chesire-cat smile.'

M'TAK
Wouldn't it, though?

Lilli turns away from M'Tak and looks ahead while M'Tak's gaze lingers on her, but she bears an expression of amusement on her face as his gaze lingers.

Rea settles in next to Lilli, and Elemud settles into the seat in front of Rea near the head of the table. Ptat sits at the foot of the table, separating himself somewhat from the senior staff.

CORINTH
We don't have a lot of time to spare, so our resident non-operative covert, who received intel about this mission well-before even I did, has already trimmed everything down for us. It goes without saying that everything discussed here is classified as tippity-top secret and we aren't even supposed to have it, even though a lot of it pertains to our mission. Everyone say thanks, intel-ninja!

EVERYONE
Thanks, intel-ninja!

M'TAK
'Wuv you too.

M'Tak stands and moves to the front of the room. He waves his right hand, and three emblems appear in digital-visual state: the 309TH FLEET EMBLEM, the Greater Court of Caliphax EMBLEM, and the 82ND BATTALLION LOGO structured into a pyramid with the Greater Court of Caliphax emblem at the top.

M'TAK (CONT'D)
Caliphax, formerly a Class-M pre-warp planet of the Alpha Quad's Ogoro sector, formerly ravaged by a six-thousand year-long civil war; discovered by the USS Fort Myers in the year 2350. In 2351, the USS Bethlehem ventures to Caliphax to check on the Fort Myers due to loss of contact, and is destroyed by the Fort Myers following a skirmish in orbit over Caliphax. Days later, the senior staff of the Fort Myers send a subspace-transmission to Starfleet declaring that due to their direct intervention into and resolution of the Caliphax Civil War, the natives gave them leadership of the planet, and they subsequently formed an oligarchial planetary government known as the Greater Court of Caliphax.

In 2353, this claim was confirmed by a Federation ambassador, accompanied by heavy military escort. According to an old-school Prime Directive loophole, even with UFP planets, UFP must acquiesce to the will of that planet's people and the people chose the Greater Court. However, that wasn't the end of it.

The digital display depicts a man in a black leather outfit on his knees, with a phaser being held to his head by a uniformed Greater Court soldier.

M'TAK (CONT'D)

Starfleet had no choice but to leave Caliphax to its own devices...but Section 31 doesn't listen to Starfleet too much. In 2355, the Greater Court captured an undercover Section 31 operative while he was engaging in various actions to destabilize the government, among them murder and espionage. He was executed following military tribunal, and while Caliphax held Starfleet responsible for the actions of Section 31, they didn't act against Starfleet for it. However, they went out and made friends with for-profit military contractors that hooked them up with a fleet of an unknown number of quality UFP, Klingon, and Romulan ships which became the 309th in exchange for the natural and rare resources of Caliphax. It is important to note that with the exception of capital punishment, Greater Court law mirrors UFP law and like the UFP, they maintain an absolute socialist economy.

The digital screen next displays A TALL ASIAN MALE wearing a green/white (Greater Court) uniform while SHAKING HANDS WITH AN ALIEN BEING IN RAGS.

M'TAK (CONT'D)

The Greater Court's primary purpose has grown from the governing of Caliphax to exploration and humanitarian intervention in the affairs of poverty-stricken, war-torn, and politically-stratified pre-warp worlds-

(shrugs)

-worlds the Federation will not make first contact with, such as Sephos, given the fact that most societies on Sephos, with a population of 200 million, practice a form of

'unofficial apartheid.' However, they do fit the Greater Court's criteria for intervention.

The digital screen next displays a GOLD-SKINNED HUMANOID WITH MATCHING SKIN-RIDGES ON OPPOSITE CHEEKS.

M'TAK (CONT'D)

This man behind me is Maxes-Dur-Lailen, considered to be a Sephosian conspiracy theorist and political activist. He is famous on his world for alleging that the financial elite of this planet, among many things, are withholding high-level technology from the populace, and to some he's even stated that his government is covering up the existence of aliens.

DOUG

But it's true, isn't it.

M'TAK

The elite-class of Sephos has been aware of the existence of the UFP and possibly the Klingon Empire for at least three decades, yes. Only thing is, UFP surveyors weren't sent to record anything on this world until *twenty-five* years ago, and the Klingon Empire didn't think this world was worth the effort of conquering. Don't bother asking how the Sephosians became so aware and it's quite the Starfleet intel mystery. And don't go and blame 31, either. Maxes-Dur-Lailen is on the run from his government, and reliable intel suggests that 309th is here to extract him before his own people get to him. Our own common sense suggests that they want to use him in their plan to destabilize the Sephosian government and eventually intervene.

REA

Define 'intervene.'

CORINTH

The Greater Court of Caliphax politely asks the bad government to accept certain terms, reforms, and aid, and if they are refused, things get messy.

M'TAK

But rarely to the point of full-scale invasion. No, all it usually takes is to cut off the heads.

LILLI

So there's no fallout from the Greater Court coming into these pre-warp worlds and just taking over?

M'TAK

The Greater Court selects member worlds with the same care that the UFP selects theirs. They don't depose governments if they believe the governed will reject the Greater Court. They currently have ten member worlds, and all of them have stayed loyal to the GC since being intervened upon.

The room falls into a tense silence for several moments.

CORINTH

So...if you're anything like me, at this point, you've got a little bit of sympathy for these devils. And that's alright, as long as you keep in mind that the Prime Directive, which the Greater Court doesn't seem to care about, isn't just about not screwing up other people's lives; it's about choice. A society is a living thing, and it has to evolve like any other living thing. The Prime Directive allows us to let societies mature to a point where they can make an informed choice about their future rather than having change thrust upon them, and it's our job to protect their right to choose even if it comes at the expense of our own lives.

Everyone except for Ptat slow-nods.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Starfleet Intelligence believes the Greater Court will attempt to extract Maxes-du-Lailentoday, andtheirintel is reliable enough that they've tasked the crew of the USS Madrid from preventing the extraction while keeping Sephos' greater populace completely unaware of our existence. We will rendezvous with Captain Gaise of the USS Madrid in orbit of Sephos, and hopefully we'll beat the 309th there.

(faces Doug)

We are on standing yellow alert until the conclusion of this operation.

DOUG

Aye aye.

CORINTH

(faces Lilli)

Coordinate with the quartermaster. Make sure the away team kits and the emergency kits are completely together, though I'm not anticipating we'll have any need of an away team for this op.

(faces Rea)

Put your security teams on standby. No one is off duty right now. For everyone else, it's business as usual.

(looks at everyone)

If there are no further questions, you're all dismissed.

Corinth remains seated as the others leave.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Stay behind, Doug, Ptat.

Doug and Ptat return to their seats.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Doc, what are we looking at in terms of political consequences of this mission? Long-term?

PTAT

(shrugs)

Starfleet is already waging wars down in the Delta and against the Iconians. Regardless of what happens here, they will not want another war, but at the same time, they will absolutely not be pleased if the Greater Court successfully violates the Prime Directive on Sephos. Lethal force may not be authorized at this time, but if you find yourself in a situation where it's required...Starfleet may forgive you as long as you complete the mission to the letter.

After a pauses, Ptat smirks to himself.

DOUG

What's funny?

PTAT

Our ironic Skipper is. We're supposed to be die-hard anti-intervention, but he just spent two weeks meditating with the Organians, and their intervention in preventing what could've been a Federation-Klingon war back in the 2360's probably saved billions of lives on both sides.

Doug lets out a short laugh.

CORINTH

Yeah, I can appreciate that irony. But did they really prevent anything, given that we just had a war with the Klingons anyway?

PTAT

Pfft. No one thought that was going to last, Rowe.

DOUG

Tell that to the families of KIA crewmen that the Commander and I served with on the Barack Obama during the war.

CORINTH

And let's really look at the 2360's: "The Golden Age of Crazy Captains." How often did some Skipper go to a pre-warp planet and take control, thinking they could make things better, but almost-always made them worse? I've got memories from six lifetimes of soldiering, and every one of those soldiers has had to deal with an entire planetary society that went south because some jerk with captain's or admiral's bars decided he could do better than God.

PTAT

The Vulcans intervened on the humans and it saved them from oblivion. Every now and then, Rowe, people need a helping hand, whether they want it or not. The alternative is self-destruction.

DOUG

So you don't believe in the Prime Directive now?

PTAT

I'm haven't been in Starfleet for twenty-years, Doug, so I'm not required to believe in or enforce the Directive. But that doesn't mean I don't believe in a whole lot of other Starfleet ideals.

(pauses)

How was Organia this time?

CORINTH

Nothing too different from every other time. Just me, myself, and the other Rowes.

PTAT

You know, I admire you for honoring the traditions of those that came before you.

CORINTH

To be fair, doc, it's not about tradition. It's about keeping The Outlaw in check.

DOUG

Which one is he, again?

All of the Rows suddenly appear, standing next to Corinth, who is sitting.

AUGOR

An grizzled, tough-looking black male in his mid-60's.

CORINTH

Augor's the first of us, he's 'The Lawman.'

SELIG

A white male in his early-20's.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Then came Selig; 'The Kid.'

BASTISTE

A broad-shouldered, tough-looking Latino male in his late 40's.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Bastiste is 'The Outlaw.'

FAYGAN

A middle-aged black man with a "kind" face.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Faygan's 'The Redeemer.'

GATCHA

CORINTH (CONT'D)

And ol' Gatcha's 'The Ranger.'

BACK TO SCENE

The other Rows have disappeared as focus returns to Corinth.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

There's a seventh, but I only have glimpses of him...or her. That's how vague my memories of the seventh are.

PTAT

I don't know how you Trill slugbellies deal with it. Most people got a gruff-enough time dealing with just their own memories.

(pause)

I better get my team ready for this intervention-prevention malarky. Need anything else, Skipper?

CORINTH

Nope.

Ptat rises up and leaves, but Doug stays behind.

DOUG

Leave it to a Tellarite to call his Skipper a 'slugbelly' to his face.

CORINTH

At this point, I think we've all kind of numbed to his douchebaggery.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado drops out of warp near a PRESIDIO-CLASS STARSHIP in orbit of a planet similar in appearance to Earth.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

All bridge officers are on the Desperado's bridge, and Corinth is sitting in the captain's chair.

ELEMUD

Captain, we're being hailed by the Madrid.

CORINTH

Put him on.

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - GAISE ON THE VIEWSCREEN

Captain GAISE, a brown-haired Vulcan male in a regular red Starfleet uniform with captain's rank insignia on the neck, cants his head towards Rowe.

GAISE

Greetings, Commander Rowe. I appreciate your arrival here on short notice, but it appears we are both too late. As we warped into Sephos-proximity, a shuttle landed on the planet's surface while its two tactical escorts departed the system. As it is with hurried extraction operations, the two escort crafts were to initiate a beam-out of the target; the Runabout shuttle was an extraction contingency plan. The escorts were not able to initiate the beam-out of Maxes-dur-Lailen before we arrived.

BACK TO SCENE

CORINTH

Did you engage the escorts?

GAISE

No, which means a non-violent solution with the 309th can still be reached. I was about to deploy my own away team to catch up with the 309th's extraction team before you arrived.

CORINTH

With all due respect to you and the Madrid crew, captain, crews like mine exist so primarily science-slash-exploration crews like yours don't have to put yourselves in harm's way. Along those lines, how can we help?

EXT. SEPHOS HILLS

Corinth, Lilli, Rea, Ptat, M'Tak, and Egbert BEAM IN atop a mountain path overlooking a DENSE FOREST.

Corinth is armed with his twin holstered phaser pistols, Lilli has is holding her tricorder and has a large engineer's backpack and phaser rifle strapped to her back, Rea and Egert are already holding their full-auto phaser rifles, Ptat is carrying a large phaser pulse rifle, and M'Tak has a PHASER SNIPLE RIFLE strapped to his back.

CORINTH

Lots and lots of trees. Mr. M'Tak, if you wouldn't mind finding a support position?

Without replying, M'Tak easily SCALES FORTY FEET DOWN THE MOUNTAIN and vanishes into the forest.

As Lilli operates her tricorder, she appears confused by something.

LILLI
Sir?

CORINTH
Hm?

LILLI
I detected twelve lifeforms off to the west a second ago, but now there's eleven-

A gunshot resonates throughout the area.

LILLI (CONT'D)
-and now ten.

CORINTH
Down the path, now!

The away team hurries down the mountain path, and each teammate draws weapons as they do.

EXT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE LANDING SITE

Using the trees as cover, each teammate moves from cover position to cover position with military precision and speed as they approach the runabout shuttle that has landed in an open clearing within the forest.

In his point-position behind cover, Corinth puts his back against the tree and taps his combadge.

CORINTH
(whispers)
Rowe to M'Tak. Sitrep.

M'TAK (O.S.)
Elevated position. I see you.

CORINTH
Eyes on targets?

M'TAK (O.S.)
Affirmative, but I'm not liking what I'm seeing. Also, your area is clear, so you can stop skulking about.

Corinth steps out from cover and looks ahead:

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - RUNABOUT SHUTTLE

Corinth approaches the landed, open starship alone and investigates the hull, which is STAINED WITH RED BLOOD.

CORINTH
You're sure this area is clear?

M'TAK (O.S.)
Copy that, Rowe. Whomever made this mess made it and moved on pretty fast. They knew what they were doing.

CORINTH
What mess?

M'TAK
Other side of the ship.

Corinth hurries to the starboard side of the starship and sees:

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - THREE UNIFORMED, STACKED HUMAN CORPSES

Corinth winces, but does not recoil at the sight of the bodies. In fact, he begins to examine them.

CORINTH
Bullets, fired into center-of-mass.
The natives did this.

Corinth taps his combadge.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Rowe to bridge.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug is occupying the captain's chair.

DOUG
Bridge.

CORINTH (V.O.)
Is Lt. C'Serra on the bridge?

DOUG
She is.

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

The bridge of the Runabout is empty. As Corinth enters and approaches the primary flight consoles, he reaches into one of the pouches of his tactical belt and removes a SMALL, CIRCULAR BLACK DEVICE. He slaps it atop the right-most of the two flight consoles.

CORINTH
I'm in a runabout shuttle on the ground.

The small device LIGHTS UP.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Is it broadcasting now?

DOUG (O.S.)
It is.

CORINTH
Have Elle draw out anything could be
considered intel.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

A digital screen materializes next to the science console,
displaying a BLUE OPERATIONAL SCHEMATIC of the runabout shuttle.
Encrypted text scrolls down the right side of the schematic.

ELEMUD
Negative on intel, X-O. They scrubbed
everything the second they landed.

DOUG
They deleted everything, Commander.

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

Corinth walks towards the shuttle's exit.

CORINTH
Damn. Render it inoperable, and then
we'll blow it once we've finished the
mission.

DOUG (O.S.)
Everything alright, Commander?

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Corinth steps out of the shuttle.

CORINTH
Have Elle put me through to Captain
Gaise.

A few seconds pass.

GAISE (O.S.)
Your situation, Commander Rowe?

CORINTH

Our targets are dead, sir. Executed by natives who are after their extract.

GAISE (O.S.)
That's quite a development.

INT. USS MADRID BRIDGE

Captain Gaise is standing at parade rest on his bridge; many VULCAN AND HUMAN crewmembers are going about their duties.

GAISE
Under normal circumstances, the mission would be over. But given the number of unknowns, such as how the Sephosians are so aware of off-world matters, these are not normal circumstances.

(pauses)
The 309th's extraction target may be the key to gaining some much-needed intel. You must now complete *their* mission.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

CORINTH
As in extract their target?

INT. MADRID BRIDGE

GAISE
Indeed. If successful, you will not have broken the Prime Directive, as all Sephosian parties involved in your mission are apparently already well-aware of the existence of both Starfleet and the Greater Court. However, maximum force is still not authorized, and you may only extract the target if he is willing to go with you.

CORINTH (O.S.)
Affirmative, Rowe out.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Ptata is standing next to the carefully laid-out bodies of the dead 309th officers and taps his combadge.

PTAT
Potari to Desperado; five to the morgue.

The bodies are beamed out.

CORINTH

Our mission has changed into an extraction. Lilli, pull up any surrounding lifesigns on your tricorder and release the hounds.

Lilli removes her backpack, unzips it, and takes out a large steel case. She opens it by pressing her thumb against the lock, and the case automatically opens, revealing TWO METALLIC, MEDIUM-SIZED DRONES inside of the case.

Lilli removes her tricorder from her belt, opens it, and begins operating it.

LILLI

I'm picking up eight to the northeast; seven together one kilometer away and one half-a-kilometer northeast of them.

The drones hover out of the case and lift until they're two-hundred feet in the air, and then they ZOOM into the northeastern direction.

EXT. AIR ABOVE SEPHOS FOREST

The drones fly northeast until they are two-hundred feet above a secluded CABIN IN THE WOODS surrounded by trees.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Four digital screens appear in front of Lilli, displaying the cabin from four different angles.

LILLI

Voice-Rec. X-Ray.

The four angles are displayed in X-RAY MODE, and all four reveal a skeletal view of a LONE SEPHOSIAN inside of the cabin, taking cover behind a couch in the living room and aiming a weapon very similar to a shotgun at the front door.

LILLI (CONT'D)

That's our man, Commander. He probably heard the gunshots, same as we did.

REA

There's no way we'll get to him on foot before they do.

CORINTH

Given our tactical and tech advantage over the enemy, I think an ambush is strategic can-do.

EXT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

SEVEN MASKED BEINGS wearing green body armor and carrying Sephonian variations of assault rifles quietly converge on the cabin, and as they approach the front, the group breaks apart and they start surrounding the cabin.

MONTAGE

-Four masked beings flank the front door.

-One masked being takes cover behind an broadside cabin wall.

-Two masked beings flank the cabin's back door.

BACK TO SCENE

A gunshot, fired from inside of the house, blows through the front door.

MAXES

R'gurgen!

Another gunshot is fired from inside of the cabin, but none of the masked beings are hit.

One of the masked beings at the front door turns to his teammates at the front.

LEAD MASKED BEING

Ekosi Eet.

The leadmaskedbeing holds up his right hand and counts off numbers.

LEAD MASKED BEING (CONT'D)

Moi, Sai, Eet!

The masked beings at the front door kick the front door in, but when they do, all four of them suddenly pause and fall forward simultaneously.

Due to the BURN MARKS ON THEIR BACKS, it is apparent that they were shot with a phaser-based weapon.

EXT. TREES ABOVE SEPHOS FOREST

From a long, sturdy branch on the forest's tallest tree, M'Tak aims a sniper-phaser rifle at distant targets.

M'TAK

Front door, four down.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Corinth, Rea, Egert, and Ptat are standing together.

CORINTH
Copy that, M'Tak. Lilli, transmit your
first mark up to the ship, and the
transporter chief'll do a
site-to-site.

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

Lilli is one on knee in the center of the cockpit, and a digital screen, DISPLAYING THE ACTION AROUND THE CABIN, is in front of her. Lilli operates her tricorder.

LILLI
Transmitted.

EXT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Rea BEAMS IN behind one of the trees surrounding the cabin's area, specifically the cabin's broadside. She quickly steps out from behind the tree and fires her phaser rifle at the masked being covering the cabin's broadside.

The phaser beam strikes the masked being in the upper right shoulder, and he collapses forward.

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

LILLI
That's my girl. Your turn, Ensign
Egbert.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Egert exhales slowly and raises his rifle; Corinth notices his apparent nervousness.

CORINTH
Change of plan, he's not going in alone.

Corinth draws his twin pistols.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Send us both, same position.

Corinth and Egert are BEAMED OUT together.

EXT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Corinth and Egert are beamed behind another set of trees surrounding the cabin's area.

CORINTH
Peek your head out.

With some reluctance, Egert peers out from cover.

EGERT'S P.O.V. - TWO MASKED BEINGS KICKING IN THE BACK DOOR

BACK TO SCENE

EGERT
They're moving in, sir.

CORINTH
Heavy stun, on me.

Corinth hurries out of cover and rushes towards and into the cabin with Egert following him.

INT. MAXES' CABIN

As the two masked beings run through the cabin's kitchen, a gunshot is fired directly into the UPPER CHEST of one of the two masked beings, causing him to recoil. The shot has no effect on the masked being's armor, and he quickly recovers.

The other masked being aims his assault rifle directly at Maxes, but Egert fires a phaser blast into the center of his back, causing the masked being to collapse instantly.

The second masked being raises his assault rifle at Egert, but Corinth fires TWO PURPOSE STUN-BLASTS from his pistols which immediately drop the remaining masked man.

However, Maxes aims his shotgun at Egert, and Corinth shoves Egert against the kitchen oven, causing the shotgun blast to narrowly miss Egert.

Corinth takes cover behind the threshold wall connecting the kitchen to the living room, and Egert scrambles for cover beneath the kitchen table. Egert pushes the kitchen table over and uses it to shield himself.

CORINTH
Stop shooting!

MAXES
I promise you, Tamma-Blanks...I promise you! You may take me down, but a few of you are coming with me!

CORINTH
We're not your enemy!

MAXES

Did you kill my contacts in the Greater Court of Caliphax?

CORINTH

No, but these men did when your Greater Court contacts came to extract you.

Maxes pauses for a moment.

MAXES

Are you apart of 'Skyfleet'?

CORINTH

Starfleet!

MAXES

Don't you hate the Greater Court?

CORINTH

That's complicated. But if we were your enemies, you'd be dead already. Think about it, if we ride around in starships as your information suggests, we could've just orbital-bombed this entire range and been done with it.

MAXES

Maybe you just need me alive-

Maxes is struck in the back by a phaser beam and falls forward, dropping his weapon. The attacker is revealed to be Ptat, whom is standing in the doorway, holding a phaser rifle.

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

LILLI

All clear, Commander. Hostiles are out-cold, and there are no other signs of life for six kilometers in all directions.

INT. MAXES' CABIN

Corinth rises out of his cover position and enters the living room. Maxes is awake, but obviously disoriented.

PTAT

Why you gotta make an old man save the day when you've got so many willing young guns?

Corinth nods to Ptat and then turns to Maxes as Rea enters the cabin. Rea immediately props Maxes against the back of the couch.

CORINTH

I'm Commander Corinth Rowe, Starfleet.
You'll be alright, Maxes. You were hit
with a stun blast.

Maxes groans.

MAXES

Stun rather than vaporize? That's not
characteristic of the Skyfleet I've
heard about.

CORINTH

Starfleet. And I'm betting you've been
misinformed about us, considering that
the Greater Court is your source of
information.

MAXES

They aren't my only source, Commander
Rowe. The Tamma-Blanks have a great
deal of negative information about
you.

CORINTH

They just tried to kill you. I wouldn't
think of them as being
very...reliable.

MAXES

They tried to kill me not because I know
the truth of your existence, but
because I have tried to share that
truth, among others, with people of
this world.

Corinth nods.

CORINTH

The Tamma-Blanks are informed enough
that they knew where to find your
Greater Court contacts right before
you were scheduled to be picked up, and
where to find you.

Maxes slowly stands.

MAXES

The Tamma-Blanks political faction has
means of communicating with forces
outside of our world; it's one of the
technologies they hoard. I have
evidence which suggests they've been
in contact with aliens, such as
yourself, for decades.

CORINTH

Where is this evidence?

Maxes grins.

MAXES

Several safe places. I may not look like it right now, Commander, but I have quite a bit of influence on this world. There are many like me who consider it their duty to hold their government accountable for its actions.

CORINTH

Then why seek political asylum with the Greater Court?

MAXES

There is nowhere on this world to hide from the Tamma-Blanks for long. I'd hoped to take refuge away from this world and eventually return to assist the Greater Court in overthrowing the Tamma-Blanks.

Corinth shrugs.

CORINTH

You aren't safe here, and you should probably come with us instead. However, there's no way that Starfleet is going to help you overthrow any Sephoshian government. We don't get involved in that kind of thing.

MAXES

Then I'm not coming with you, even if the Tamma-Blanks come after me again. Besides, if you're not allowed to intervene in the affairs of our world, why are you even talking to me?

Corinth and Rea exchange glances.

REA

Our rule of non-intervention, the Prime Directive, states that once a cultural contamination has occurred, we can intervene only as far as it takes to minimize its long-term damage. We need you because we need to know exactly how much your culture's been contaminated, and the exact source of the contamination.

MAXES

And once you know those things?

CORINTH

Our superiors make the decision. Starfleet is the armada of the UFP, and

it consists of explorers, diplomats,
soldiers...we aren't any of those
things, at least not primarily. We're
more like marshals.

MAXES

You're quite different from the
Starfleet I've been investigating, you
know.

CORINTH

And you're a truth-seeker. Come with
us, and see the truth of everything for
yourself.

Maxes appears to consider Corinth's invitation, but is interrupted
by the beeping of Corinth's combadge. Corinth taps it.

CORINTH (CONT'D)

Rowe here.

GAISE (O.S.)

Status, commander?

CORINTH

We've secured the perimeter on the
ground. I'm speaking with
Maxes-du-Lailen now.

GAISE (O.S.)

Do not extract yet, even if he agrees
to come.

CORINTH

Why?

INT. MADRID BRIDGE

Gaise sits in his captain's chair, bearing a look of determination
on his face.

GAISE

There has been a development in orbit,
Commander. A rather strange craft has
warped in near Sephos orbit-

VIEWSCREEN - AN OLD, DERELICT FREIGHTER

BACK TO SCENE

GAISE (CONT'D)

I recommend you coordinate with your
crew, and under no circumstances are
you to proceed with extraction until

I personally give the go-ahead. Gaise out.

MADRID BRIDGE OFFICER
Sir, we've finished our initial scan of the vessel. Despite its exterior condition, it's fully-operational in all respects...for a 22nd century vessel. Also, there is only one lifeform aboard.

GAISE
Zoom in, try to find something that identifies the name of the ship.

VIEWSCREEN - FREIGHTER OUTER HULL: "HORIZON"

BACK TO SCENE

MADRID BRIDGE OFFICER
That's impossible!

GAISE
It is extremely illogical, Lieutenant, but not impossible.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug looks at the viewscreen with an expression of bewilderment.

DOUG
Is it just me, or am I right now looking at a ship that's been lost for over two-hundred years?

ELEMUD
Pardon?

DOUG
The ECS Horizon, Elle. Her crew accidentally contaminated a culture during the pre-Prime Directive days and went missing shortly thereafter. Most people think the Romulans got her, but the truth of her remains a mystery.
(grins)
And the source of quite a few Academy ghost stories.

INT. MADRID BRIDGE

GAISE
Put a tractor on the Horizon and prepare an away team.

MADRID BRIDGE OFFICER

Aye, sir-

The lights on the bridge flicker between on and off rapidly.

MADRID BRIDGE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Sir! Our forward shields-

EXT. - SPACE

The derelict freighter fires a full volley of dual cannon blasts that collide with the Madrid' upper-saucer.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug hurries into the navigator's seat and operates the console.

DOUG

Red Alert, full power to engines!

The ship enters 'Red Alert' mode. Elemud furiously operates her console.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado swerves left rather than flying directly towards the Horizon.

The Madrid isn't returning fire at all, but is being barraged by cannon fire from the Horizon.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

DOUG

Hail the Madrid!

Elemud operates her console.

ELEMUD

They aren't answering! She's been headshot!

EXT. SPACE

The Horizon fires several ANTIPROTON AFT LASER blasts at the Desperado, but the Desperado is only hit by a few of them due to evasive maneuvering on Doug's part.

The Desperado flies out a little farther, does a hard 180, and soars towards the Horizon's aft.

INT. - DESPERADO BRIDGE

DOUG
Power to shields!

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado soars towards the Horizon's aft and opens fire with a full cannon barrage, and all shots STRIKE THE HORIZON'S SHIELDS.

The Horizon returns fire with aft lasers, but the Desperado completely swerves to avoid them.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug's combadge beeps, and Doug taps it while controlling navigation.

DOUG
We're under attack. One hostile, freighter. We're currently utilizing Stick-and-Move attack patterns.

INT. SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

As everyone in the cabin hears Corinth's communication with Doug, they surround him.

CORINTH
We have orders to stay down here. Keep up with the current attack pattern, but your primary role is to support the Madrid.

DOUG (O.S.)
Negative, Commander. The Madrid's been headshot, and the enemy is wailing away on her.

EXT. SPACE

The Horizon fires a seemingly endless stream of cannon fire at the Madrid, causing explosions and serious hull damage.

The Desperado flies directly at the Horizon again and lands another cannon volley against its starboard shields.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

ELEMUD
Enemy aft down to 97 percent!

DOUG
That's it? Really?

ELEMUD
I have no explanation for it either,
sir!

DOUG
Status of the Madrid?

ELEMUD
Hull integrity at 45 percent! Escape
pods launching!

EXT. SPACE

ESCAPE PODS are launched from the belly of the Madrid, but they
are individual VAPORIZED by the Horizon's KINETIC CUTTING BEAM.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

DOUG (O.S.)
Commander, the Madrid is going down and
its unlikely even one of her escape pods
will make it to the surface.

Corinth grimaces.

CORINTH
Enemy damage?

DOUG (O.S.)
Hardly any.

CORINTH
A freighter does this?

DOUG (O.S.)
It's the ECS Horizon, Commander. I know
it sounds crazy-

CORINTH
Do whatever you have to do to make sure
those pods get clear of the Horizon!

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Appearing angry, Doug operates his navigation console.

DOUG
Elle, power to weapons!

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado makes a fast pass at the Horizon and bombards its portside with its own flurry of cannon fire, but the Horizon lands several phaser blasts on the Desperado's aft as it passes.

The Desperado does another hard 180, but its forward shields are riddled with antiproton fire as it turns and heads back at the Horizon for another pass. The Desperado lands every one of its dozen cannon blasts upon the Horizon's starboard, but the Horizon lands its share of antiproton blasts on the Desperado's forward shields.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

EXPLOSIONS occur on the Desperado's bridge, but no one is injured yet.

SUBSTITUTE TACTICAL OFFICER
Forward shields at 15 percent.

DOUG
Target weapon subsystems. Take out that beam!

The lights on the Desperado's bridge flicker.

SUBSTITUTE TACTICAL OFFICER
Our aft shields are down!

DOUG
Damn it! Pump auxillary power into our aft.

EXT. SPACE

Six of the many launched escape pods plummet through Sephos' atmosphere.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

ELEMUD
Some of the pods are getting away, X-O.

DOUG
Then we've gotta hold out until they all get-

The lights on the bridge flicker again. Elemud operates her console.

ELEMUD
Sir...all of our shields are down.

DOUG
What?

ELEMUD
They've hacked through every shield
generator security firewall we have.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado's aft is violently rocked by a steady stream of antiproton blasts.

INT. DESPERADO ENGINEERING

HEAVY SPARKS fly from the Desperado's warp core, and the engineering crew scrambles to maintain its very operation.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

The bridge hard-rocked by the barrage, and the Tactical Bridge Officer standing in for Rea is tossed to the floor.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

The bridge is hard-rocked by the barrage, and the Substitute Tactical Officer standing in for Rea is tossed to the floor.

ELEMUD
Sustained damage to our warp core! We
couldn't warp now if we wanted to.

Elemud gulps.

ELEMUD (CONT'D)
Orders?

DOUG
Status of impulse?

ELEMUD
Active.

DOUG
Face that damn ghost ship and fire until
we can't fire anymore.

CORINTH (O.S.)
Lt. Nellis!
(pauses)
Doug!

DOUG
(slowly)
We're going to get more of those ships
clear, Corinth. Stay with your
extract.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Corinth and the other members of the away team, clearly distressed, huddle around Corinth.

CORINTH

Doug...

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

SPARKS fly from several of the consoles, and a fire breaks out at the Tactical Bridge Officer's station, which is automatically EXTINGUISHED.

DOUG

Six...now eight people are alive that would otherwise be dead because you made the call to save them, Corey.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado continues futilely firing on the Horizon's starboard, and the Horizon returns antiproton fire on the Desperado's aft.

Meanwhile, the Madrid shows signs of breaking apart due to Horizon's cannon fire.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug turns around in his nav seat and faces the rest of the bridge crew.

DOUG

I'm going at the enemy with whatever ramming speed our impulse engines can still muster. Any objections?

Though she seems terrified, Elemud exchanges glances with the other bridge officers and faces Doug again.

ELEMUD

No sir!

Doug sits back down and operates his console.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado surges ahead, but when it is finally close to the Horizon, the Horizon captures the Desperado in a TRACTOR BEAM.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

The ship is rocked by its tractoring.

ELEMUD
We're being hailed.

Doug tries to catch his breath.

DOUG
Put them on.

VIEWSCREEN - A ORANGE-FACED PUPPET

BACK TO SCENE

DOUG (CONT'D)
What. The. Hell.

ORANGE-FACED PUPPET
Nice try on the 'damn the torpedos' bit,
and for trying to save the evacuees of
the Madrid. For that, you will be
rewarded with another minute or two to
live, and a little bit of
entertainment-

VIEWSCREEN - ESCAPE PODS IN SPACE

DOUG
Don't you dare!

EXT. SPACE

Six of the remaining twelve escape pods are VAPORIZED by the
Horizon's beams and cannon fire.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

Doug grimaces hard and glares at the screen.

DOUG
Coward!

ORANGE-FACED PUPPET
Behold the depths of your failure,
Starfleeter.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Corinth and the rest are listening to what's occurring on the
Desperado, but say nothing. Corinth's combadge beeps again, and
he taps it.

GAISE (O.S.)
(coarsely)
Commander-

CORINTH
Captain Gaise!

GAISE (O.S.)
You must hold to your mission
parameters, no matter what-

INT. MADRID BRIDGE

The Madrid bridge is in absolute ruin, fires are everywhere, and the area is littered with the dead bodies of bridge officers. Captain Gaise lays on the floor, struggling to even move.

GAISE
The future of billions is now in your
hands. May you live long and prosper,
Corinth Rowe.

Gaise taps his combadge, cutting off communication.

GAISE (CONT'D)
Computer.

COMPUTER (O.S.)
Responding.

GAISE
Initiate self-destruct,
authorization
Omega-Omega-Epsilon-Sigma-Nine.

Gaise faces the CRACKED VIEWSCREEN, which displays the Horizon.

GAISE (CONT'D)
May you not live long, and may you not
prosper.

EXT. SPACE

The Horizon vaporizes the last two escape pods.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

ELEMUD
Sir, our bridge is being targeted.

Doug stands and faces the bridge; behind him, the viewscreen displays the Horizon as it hovers near what remains of the Madrid.

DOUG

It's been an honor serving with-

Behind Doug, the viewscreen shows the Madrid's COMPLETE EXPLOSION, and the SHOCKWAVE knocks the Horizon backwards.

ELEMUD
Sir! The Madrid!

Doug turns and is astonished when he sees what's happened to both the Madrid and the Horizon.

Elemud operates her console.

ELEMUD (CONT'D)
The tractor lock's broken!

DOUG
Status of Horizon?

ELEMUD
Starboard shields down!

Doug taps his combadge.

DOUG
Commander, the Madrid just self-destructed and the Horizon's vulnerable.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Corinth and the other members of the away team immediately appear more hopeful.

CORINTH
You're in no condition to fight it. Full-impulse into Sephos's stratosphere and await further orders.

EXT. SPACE

The Desperado lurches towards Sephos, but picks up speed and soon enters the planet's atmosphere.

INT. SEPHOSIAN HILLSIDE CABIN

CORINTH
Lilli, you have about three minutes to find a very discreet place for the Desperado to land. Think you can do it?

INT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

In a fervor, Lilli controls her drones by touching her digital screens.

LILLI
I'll do it like a Decker, Commander.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

CORINTH
Doug, if you still can, deploy a
distress beacon.

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS

The Desperado nosedives into the skies above Sephos, and then straightens out to begin flying normally though its apparent the starship is heavily damaged.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

DOUG
We're in stratospherical flight,
Commander.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Maxes approaches Corinth.

MAXES
Our planet has technology capable of
detecting your ship within the
stratosphere, and there are measures
for destroying it. They can't stay up
there for long.

LILLI (O.S.)
Commander, I've found something, but
its deep sea.

CORINTH
Andorian vessels don't do so well
underwater.

LILLI (O.S.)
Got a better idea?

Corinth sighs.

CORINTH
Kick the coordinates up to the bridge.

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS

The Desperado's starboard wing is suddenly struck by a ground-to-air missile.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

The bridge is rocked by the blow, but Doug and Elemud remain operating their consoles.

ELEMUD

Sir, that one was a ground-to-air missile...the natives are attacking us.

DOUG

We just aren't popular today, are we? Any luck with bringing shields back online?

ELEMUD

Negative. Whatever the Horizon did to our shield generator, they fried it for good.

DOUG

I just got coordinates to a target location, ETA five-point-five. We just gotta keep moving forward-

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS

The ship is rocked by three more missiles, damaging its wings and hull even more.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

The bridge rocks more.

ELEMUD

Sir, I'm not sure if we're even going to last five minutes.

Doug shakes his head in frustration.

DOUG

We can't even evade, not with our long-range sensors down.

INT. SEPHOSIAN SEPHOS HILLSIDE CABIN

Corinth closes his eyes, as though contemplating a difficult decision.

GATCHA (O.S.)

You're not the first man to lose a ship.

Corinth opens his eyes and turns around.

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - GATCHA ROWE STANDING AT THE BACK DOOR

BACK TO SCENE

Corinth gulps, but doesn't outwardly show his trepidation.

CORINTH
Put the Desperado on autopilot towards
its destination, set escape pod
auto-coords within three kilometers of
my present location and give the order:
all hands, abandon ship.

DOUG (O.S.)
Repeat?

CORINTH
All hands...abandon ship.

The other members of the away team immediately fall sullen as they hear the order.

INT. DESPERADO BRIDGE

DOUG
(quietly)
I copy. Computer, broadcast to all
decks-
(shouts)
All hands, abandon ship! I repeat! Head
for the escape pods!

INT. DESPERADO CORRIDOR

The corridors of the Desperado fill with crewmembers scurrying through.

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS

ESCAPE PODS launch from the belly of the Desperado as three more ground-to-air missiles strike it.

After launching all of the escape pods rocket away in the same direction.

EXT. SKIES OF SEPHOS - LATER

The Desperado is rocked by missiles as it descends towards a Sephoshian ocean, and it is finally obliterated into a FIERY MESS mere seconds before it hits the water.

EXT. BLACK SCREEN

DOUG (V.O.)
I'm in a pod right now, Commander. We're clear.

INT. HILLSIDE CABIN

CORINTH
Good. Great. And the emergency supplies pod?

DOUG (O.S.)
Launched.
(pause)
The Desperado's gone, Corey.

CORINTH
I could care less about the Desperado right now. Were there any casualties?

DOUG (O.S.)
No casualties, and don't lie and say you don't care about the Desperado. You loved her.

CORINTH
We all did.

Rea steps forward.

REA
Commander, may I speak to Doug?

CORINTH
Please do.

REA
Doug, can you hear me?

INT. ESCAPE POD

Doug is cramped within his escape pod, but he smiles.

DOUG
Yeah, cuz.

REA (O.S.)
I'm glad you're alright, and I'm proud of you.

DOUG
Aww. Hearing you say that almost makes
near-death worthwhile.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

Corinth and Maxes walk alongside each other amidst the trees near
the cabin.

CORINTH
The people that you sought political
asylum with just killed eleven-hundred
people, even after they didn't have the
ability to fight back.

MAXES
To be honest with you, Commander, I'm
no longer certain that this world needs
the assistance of any galactic
governments. From what I've seen, by
aligning with either you or the Greater
Court, we would be exchanging our
current problems for a whole set of new,
broader problems.

CORINTH
The mission isn't just about
extraction anymore, it's about
protecting your planet's right to
decide its own fate. The Greater Court
is going to take that right away from
you with or without your help because
they feel as though they're doing the
right thing, but as you've just seen,
all they're really going to do is
whatever they want.

Maxes takes a deep breath, and appears to consider Corinth's words.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

The Desperado's ESCAPE PODS land in different spots within the
forest.

Corinth, Rea, Lilli, and Ptat are standing among the
already-landed pods.

CORINTH (V.O.)
At 1320 hours, the USS Madrid and the
USS Desperado were deliberately
attacked by a ship of unknown origin,
but believed to be an attack vessel
belonging to the Greater Court of
Caliphax's Three-Hundred-and-Ninth
Fleet. With the exception of six escape
pods, the Madrid was lost with all

hands, but not before Captain Gaise of the Madrid sacrificed himself to ensure the success of his mission.

CORINTH'S P.O.V. - DOUG'S ESCAPE POD

BACK TO SCENE

Doug's escape pod opens, and Corinth immediately grabs Doug's right hand and pulls him out. While their right hands are joined, Corinth and Doug smile at each other and then come together into a tight, masculine embrace.

REA'S P.O.V. - ELEMUD'S ESCAPE POD

BACK TO SCENE

Elemud's escape pod opens, and Rea and Lilli both help her out. Elemud immediately hugs Rea, and then Lilli.

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The Desperado, however, was destroyed by the Yearlar Air Force, a military branch of one of two Sephosian global superpowers, the Republic of Yearlar. They are controlled by the Tamma-Blanks political party, and by UFP standards, they are not nice people.

Doug strolls over and locks eyes with Rea; they stare at each other for several tense moments before she jogs over to him and wraps her arms around his neck.

Corinth and Elemud lock eyes from afar; he then walks off towards the trees. Elemud smiles shyly.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST - LATER

Away from the eyes of their crewmates and behind a large tree, Corinth and Elemud hold each other in a very tender manner and then kiss.

CORINTH (V.O.)
But we will not seek retribution against the Tamma-Blanks for taking out the Desperado. In fact, it is our duty to protect them from the influence of, or worse, an invasion from the Greater Court of Caliphax.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST - LATER

The entire Desperado crew of seventy-seven is standing in a circle with Corinth at the center.

CORINTH
Miss C'Serra, put up the wall.

Within the circle, Elemud, surrounded by FIVE MEMBERS OF HER SCIENCE TEAM, presses a button on a DIGITAL DATA SCREEN directly in front of her.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Your combadges have been programmed with mobile transport-inhibitors, and they are now active. Even though we've sent a distress beacon, neither the enemy nor eventual Starfleet reinforcements have a means of beaming us out abruptly.

(pauses)
Every member of the Desperado's crew is alive right now because when you got the order to evacuate, you knew exactly what to do because we ran evac-drills five times a week.

The entire crowd murmurs their agreement.

CORINTH (CONT'D)
Even now, we may be on our own, but you've trained for scenarios like this one ten-times-over in the Academy and in our holodecks with your team leaders-

DOUG

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lt. Commander Doug Nellis.

LILLI

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lt. Commander Lillith Decker.

REA

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lieutenant Rea Thompson.

ELEMUD

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lt. Commander Elemud C'Serra.

PTAT

CORINTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Chief Surgeon Ptat Potari.

BACK TO SCENE

CORINTH (CONT'D)
And even Mr. M'Tak is somewhere out there, watching our backs and the tops of our heads. The only things we've got right now are our wits-
(surveys the circle)
-and each other, but those two things are more than enough for any Starfleet crew to survive anything the universe can throw at us!

The entire crew erupts into a cheer.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

With Corinth at the head of the crew, the crew of the Desperado marches through the Sephos forest.

Lilli and Elemud are in the rear of the crew procession. They both turn around when the crew has separated from them completely. Elemud holds up a UNIQUE TRICORDER and presses a button on its screen-

EXT. RUNABOUT SHUTTLE COCKPIT

The runabout shuttle completely EXPLODES.

EXT. SEPHOS FOREST

The Desperado's escape pods EXPLODE simultaneously.

ELEMUD
That's the last of the Desperado.

LILLI
Goodnight, sweet princess.

Lilli and Elemud face each other, and Lilli gives Elemud a slight smile. They turn around and follow the rest of the crew, but Lilli throws her right arm around Elemud's shoulders as they walk.

EXT. SPACE

A FLEET OF TWENTY-TWO SHIPS OF VARIOUS CLASSES warp into the proximity of Sephos and form a CIRCLE FORMATION around the Horizon.

INT. HORIZON BRIDGE

The Horizon bridge is not that of a derelict freighter, but is EXACTLY that of a Vengeance-class Federation Dreadnought.

SALIT, a female Tellarite, BEAMS IN wearing a Greater Court uniform with Admiral's bars on the neck. She peers around the bridge and approaches the captain's chair from behind. Upon stepping around to the front of the chair, she sees:

SALIT'S P.O.V. - AN ORANGE-FACED PUPPET

BACK TO SCENE

STANULIS (O.S.)
Adorable, isn't he?

Salit turns to her right and sees STANULIS, a white child of thirteen-years despite his deep, adult-male's voice. He wears a Greater Court Admiral's uniform with four bars instead of Salit's three, and carries two martini glasses, both filled with tranya, a pink liquid, in his left and right hands.

SALIT
Thank you for your assistance in this matter, Admiral. What's the plan from here-on?

Stanulis hands one of the martini glasses to Salit.

STANULIS
I have drones monitoring your planned extraction zone. I'm sorry, but your extraction team is dead. I don't know if the Starfleeters were responsible, and at this point, it hardly matters. Your plan to send the runabout in was a rather brilliant one, Mrs. Salit, but it did not survive contact with the enemy. We've exhausted all covert options, and now, it's time for overt if we're going to complete the operation on schedule.

Salit takes a sip.

STANULIS (CONT'D)
You have five hours to prep the battlegroup for full-scale invasion. We must establish a foothold on the

surface before Starfleet
reinforcements arrive.

SALIT

I have full faith in you, Admiral
Stanulis, but will we truly be ready
for a heavy response from Starfleet?

Stanulis smiles.

STANULIS

Oh, my dear Salit-

Stanulis presses a button on the armrest of his captain's chair.

STANULIS (CONT'D)

-I've only just begun to surprise
Starfleet.

EXT. SPACE

The derelict freighter's SHIELDS SHIMMER and the appearance of
the Horizon MATERIALIZES into its true form: a MASSIVE
VENGEANCE-CLASS INTEL DREADNOUGHT.

FADE TO BLACK.