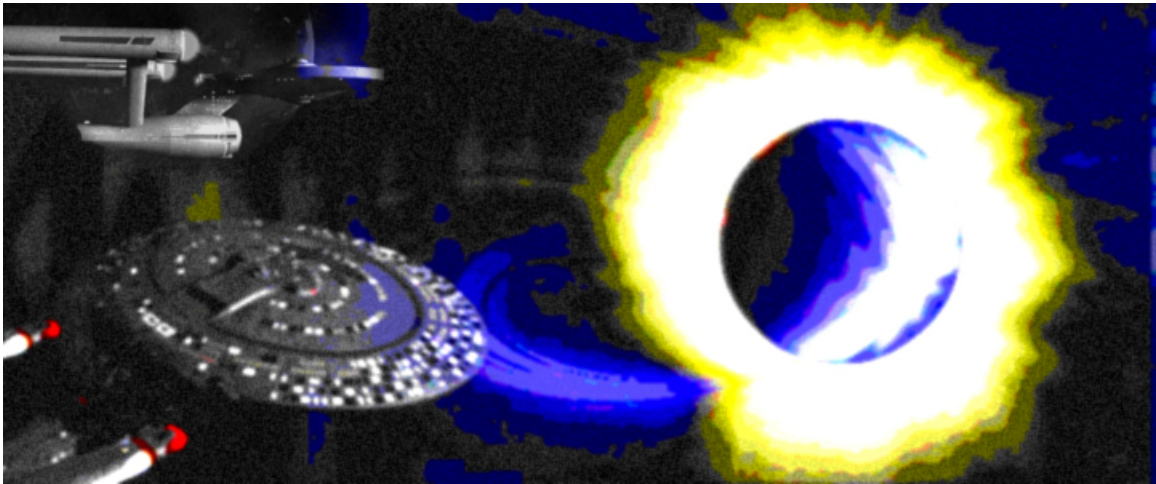


Star Trek: River of Light



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Based on Star Trek
Created by Gene Roddenberry and owned by Paramount.

Author's Notes:

Two things may strike you as you read this. The first, for anyone who's ever read a script or treatment, is that this is entirely NOT written to standard screenplay format. Without going into lengthy explanations, this was written as a labor of love---from word one it was never intended for submission, never intended to be filmed, indeed it would be an impossibility and a lesson in futility to even try. As such, while the story is solid (some parts perhaps a bit rougher than others), it was written in many formats over many months. Part script, part notes, part treatment, I've made an effort to go through it for story and continuity, however I have not had the time nor the inclination to take on the great task of converting it to a full-fledged professional screenplay or treatment (and what would be the purpose?).

The other thing you might notice is James T. Kirk's apparent return from the Nexus, inside of which he was "lost" in the film GENERATIONS. While I hint at the story behind his return, most of the details remain shrouded in mystery (perhaps I'll touch on it at a later time). Suffice it to say that this is the one leap of faith that I ask of my readers---to accept Kirk's seemingly miraculous return from the Nexus, his return from death, with no questions asked.

As far as technical details and timeline go, I tried my best to remain true and accurate to the established Star Trek canon. But I'm sure that liberties were taken, mistakes were made, and so on. Hardcore Trekkie-Techies will no doubt be able to point out countless flaws in ship types, timelines, etc. Have at it! And have fun!

Lastly, I read an article this morning that there is a pro script floating around Hollywood under consideration, tentatively titled STAR TREK: THE BEGINNING. It's worth noting that, while I'm happy with the title of "River of Light" for this piece, my original title was "Star Trek: The End."

Enjoy!

--Scott
8/30/2005

ACT ONE

Opening Scene:

A smoke filled room of smashed computers, marked by showers of sparks. Bathed in the dancing orange glow of fire, and the flashing crimson glare of RED ALERT. For a timeless moment, all is silent. And then, a computer speaks. *"Shields failing... shields failing..."*

An EXPLOSION rocks the Bridge. The viewscreen flickers to life, revealing a de-cloaked BIRD OF PREY, and two more uncloaking behind it. A volley of Photon Torpedoes flashes into life and begins its fiery sojourn, drawing ever closer.

Another explosion. The viewscreen flickers and goes dead. A thunderous triple-detonation, and the Bridge seems on the verge of shaking to pieces.

Smoke and sparks and fire fill the room. Smoldering wires fall from the ceiling. The ship is coming apart at the seams. Only the computer speaks: *"Warp Core breach, imminent... Warp Core breach, imminent... All hands abandon ship..."*

The sound of static and the crackle of electricity are deafening.

And then, a low, maniacal LAUGHTER pervades the room. Little more than a persistent chuckle at first, it takes hold and grows into a raucous, dry cackle. It is not the laughter of victory. Nor is it the laughter of defeat. Nor is it hysterics, despair, or surrender.

It is the laughter of an old man.

And it is in between spasms of this choking, biting laughter that he barks his orders. "Lock Phasers... Lock Photon Torpedos..." he rasps.

In the center of the room is a chair. A broad-shouldered man is slumped in it, still laughing. We pan around to reveal: JAMES T. KIRK.

"Fire!" he chokes, "Fire!"

Only the computer responds: *"Phasers offline... Photon Torpedoes offline..."*

Kirk's body is wracked with unremitting, convulsive laughter. He fights and gasps for each breath.

The computer pays him no mind. "*Shields collapsing...*" Another explosion shakes the room. "*Shields have collapsed... Warp core had been breached... Destruction is imminent.*"

Kirk's laughter begins, finally, to subside into a prolonged sigh, and then it is gone. Only the occasional, hiccupping chuckle threatens its return. He draws a deep breath, and holds it in as the fire and the sparks engulf the room. Smoke stings his eyes. Flames dances across Bridge, warming his skin.

Blinding white light.

"Computer," he says after a moment. "End program."

CUT TO:

INT. ROMULAN BUNKER. ROMULUS

SPOCK kneels in a sparse, windowless stone room. His head is bowed, his hair is long and unkempt and he is dressed in simple, tan robes. (Reminiscent to the way he looked during his Kohlinar trial in the beginning of "ST:The Motion Picture"). His eyes are closed and his hands clenched in front of him, as if in anguish, or as if in prayer.

As we slowly zoom in on his face, we see that he cannot help but twitch and wince, grinding his teeth as if in great pain or great mental frustration.

In the background, we can hear the unmistakable sounds of warfare: PHASER FIRE and EXPLOSIONS. Attack shuttlecraft swoop overhead and drop photon bombs. People are screaming, children crying.

Spock squeezes his eyes shut even tighter.

TITLE CARD: "ROMULUS. THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY."

A VOICE that might be in Spock's mind or might be off-screen can be heard. "*This is your fault,*" it whispers coldly, knowingly, sardonically. "*All your fault.*"

Spock: No...

Voice: Yes. Oh yes...

Spock: But that's not--

Voice: (chuckling) *Logical?*

Spock: ...Possible.

Voice: *Nevertheless. You caused this. The walls are coming down, the room is laid bare. The River of Light has run dry. And it's ALL... YOUR... FAULT.* (Laughter)

A tear escapes the corner of Spock's eye and rolls down his cheek.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE:

**STAR TREK:
RIVER OF LIGHT**

FADE IN:

EXT. IOWA, EARTH. DAY

James Kirk's ranch. A stable, a barn, a small garden, and endless acres of rolling fields and pasture.

The rustic ranch-house and the few structures around it are enclosed in a low, white fence. In the garden, a SCARECROW in a Starfleet uniform stands watch, a crow perched on its shoulder.

In the distance, a man on horseback rides lazily beneath the glaring Sun, heading towards the ranch. Bringing his horse to a gallop, Kirk coaxes it over the low fence. Not a tremendous effort, but impressive for a man of his age. "Hello there, Admiral." he nods to the scarecrow, "How goes it?" The dry rustle of straw in the warm breeze is the only reply.

"Glad to hear it," Kirk mutters to himself, spurring the mare toward the stable. "Glad to hear it."

Inside the stable, Kirk ties the horse and pets it. "Easy there, Solomon. Easy."

Kirk turns toward the ranch, but then glances back at the small annex attached to the barn. After a moment's hesitation, he turns and jogs over to it. Aside from an impressive breadth of shoulder, he is just a scarecrow of a man, himself.

He opens the barn door to reveal the original BRIDGE OF THE STARSHIP ENTERPRISE, frozen in the midst of holographic battle. Smoke hangs in the air, unmoving. Flames frozen. Sparks suspended, motionless in space.

A KLINGON BATTLE CRUISER is asleep on the main viewer, in mid-explosion, perpetually stuck in the final throws of a losing battle. Kirk smiles and steps into the holodeck. He paces the room, as if surveying the battleground, and then sits down heavily into his Captain's chair.

Kirk: Computer, run program... 000 Kirk-3C.

For a moment the room shimmers, and then everything (except for the very real CAPTAIN'S CHAIR) disappears, to be replaced by a new, pristine Bridge. Stars fly past on the viewscreen.

Kirk: (VOICE-OVER) The first few minutes are always the worst. Awkward, self conscious, unreal. But eventually the uneasiness passes, and the old reflexes kick in. I ease myself into it, and it's like it's happening all over again. Like it never ended.

Voice: (Off-Screen) Captain, they're ignoring our hail."

Kirk: (VOICE-OVER) Faces from the past return to me. The years slip away, and I feel... I feel like I've come home again... Like I've always been home. No, more even than that. I feel comfortable, at ease. It's as if the very life-blood coursing through my veins were on fire, and aware. I feel invigorated. I feel young. I feel like my old, good self again. Alive, and in the company of friends.

Voice: (Off-Screen) Captain, they're arming photon torpedoes!

Kirk: Shields up, red alert!

Voice: (Off-Screen) They're firing!

An explosion rips across the bridge. "Evasive action." orders the Captain. "Lock phasers on target... Open a channel. Hold on!" Another explosion shakes the room, and the navigation console explodes in a shower of sparks. The viewscreen flickers, and the stars begin to dissolve. And then an old, familiar face appears.

The image of KHAN NOONIAN SING taunts him, haunts him.

Kirk stands up. Another explosion knocks him back into his seat.

Voice: (Off-Screen) Captain, Photons are back on line!

James Kirk grips the arms of his chair and leans forward. "Fire!" he hisses.

But just as he speaks, all motion on the bridge suddenly freezes, leaving his command hanging in an empty, embarrassing silence. The image Khan remains frozen on the screen. Only the computer speaks. *"Subspace transmission coming in on channel 3. Priority one, for Jim Kirk. From Epsilon Station 12, in the Beta Quadrant."*

Kirk looks around, momentarily disoriented. Once he has his bearings, he leans heavily back into his chair and speaks. "Route it in here, computer. Onscreen."

Computer: Affirmative. One moment, please..."

Kirk: Wait--Computer, disengage program.

Everything disappears, save Kirk's chair and the viewscreen. Kahn's image on the screen flickers briefly and is replaced by that of an impossibly old woman. It is DR. CAROL MARCUS.

Kirk stands up. "Carol..." he reaches for the screen, as if to touch her face, but stops and slowly lowers his arm. "My god. How long has it been?"

Carol Marcus: Oh, Jim. Have you heard? (She puts her hand to her mouth, her face flushed with emotion.)

Kirk: Heard what?

Carol: Haven't you been following the news? (Her eyes are watery, there is an almost undetectable tremble in her voice.)

Kirk: No. I was just... out riding. (He looks up, trying to catch her eyes) Carol, what's happened?

Carol: Jim. A war has started on Romulus. It's insane... it's like they don't know what they're doing, like they're consumed with a violence that they can't contain...

Kirk: How...?

Carol: That's not all, Jim. It's--

Kirk: (finishing her thought) Spock...

Carol: He's missing Jim. But with the political situation what it is, I think everyone's presuming the worst. I just

called, because... I know how close he was to you... IS to you. How much he means to you.

Kirk: (in a whisper) He's family...

Carol: Jim, if there's anything--

Kirk: No. (He stands up and turns away from the screen) No, Carol. That won't be necessary.

Carol: I just thought that--

Kirk: (Angry) That I might need someone to talk to? A shoulder to cry on? That It would be better if I heard it from--(he stops himself before saying something he'll regret) ...Thank you Carol, but no.

With his back to Carol Marcus, Jim covers his eyes.

Carol: Dammit, Jim! Don't be so goddamned closed to me. Tell me what you're feeling right now.

Kirk: Maybe I should go see Nogura. Maybe I could pull some strings. Maybe I could--

Carol: (laughing ironically) Jim, you've been out of Starfleet's big picture for over eighty years now. What makes you think that--

Kirk: (in a burst of anger) Maybe I could help! (He wheels around to face her).

Carol speaks very slowly, very deliberately. "Jim, there've been rumors that the Federation preparing to enter the war. It's getting bad out there and Starfleet's not going to stand for much more." She smiles, "And the last thing they need to deal with right now, is Jim Kirk."

Kirk sits back down, rubbing his hands and mumbling to himself. "Maybe I could..."

Carol: Jim, you're an old man. Both of us. An old man and an old woman. This isn't for us. This isn't our time, anymore. The best that we can do now, is to send the Vulcan Embassy our sympathies, and sit back and hold our breath.

Kirk: (sighs and looks up at the screen) Carol, what the hell happened?

Carol: As far as is known, Spock was working underground towards Unification between Vulcan and the Romulan Star Empire when--

Kirk: (laughs) No, I mean... what happened... to everything? What happened to us?

Carol: The world changed around us, Jim. It's not our time, anymore.

Kirk mumbles, almost to himself. "A brave new generation... Carol, do you know there's a Klingon serving on the Enterprise-D?"

Carol: (smiling) It's the Enterprise-E now, Jim. And the Klingon has since transferred to DS9 and now works as the Federation ambassador to Qu'onos. (Kirk says nothing) Keep in touch, Jim. And take care of yourself.

Kirk: Always, Carol.

When Kirk is sure she's broken the connection, he finishes, "Kirk out."

For a moment he sits in silence. And then, finally, he speaks. "Computer, send a transmission to Starbase 12, Admiral Nogura, Starfleet Command. From James Kirk. 'Bill, it's Jim. Request that you contact me as soon as it's convenient. Thank you. That's all.'"

A brief moment passes before the computer responds. "*Admiral Nogura retired on Stardate 462317. Forty seven years ago.*"

Kirk slumps in his chair. Moments pass in silence, and then he pries himself from his seat and steps outside. He stands for a long while, gazing up into the star-filled sky.

PICARD'S HOME, FRANCE

Picard is celebrating his birthday (70th?), with a small, personal gathering of his closest friends. His entire crew, as well as several notable cameos from various episodes/shows, are present (Wesley, Vash, Tom Riker).

At the party (over wine from his family's vineyard) Picard proposes a toast and announces to his friends that he plans to officially inform Starfleet of his intention to retire next month.

When asked what he plans to do now, he laughs. "Maybe become a diplomat." It is obvious that he's half-joking (he is getting old, and the point of retiring is to get OUT of political affairs and military operations), "Maybe take up archeology... maybe write my book!"

"The great intergalactic novel" Geordie LaForge jokes.

At one point, an instrumental version of "Blue Skies" plays in the background. A touching moment where no one speaks but all remember their fallen friend Data.

Later, when the two are alone, Captain Riker excitedly tells Picard of his latest assignment. "You might be interested in this, Jean-Luc..." The two briefly recap the the recent turmoil on Romulus has been all over the news the past few days, both on the Starfleet and public subspace channels. Riker confides in his former captain.

Riker: I've been ordered by Starfleet to go get Spock.

Picard: Get Spock?

Picard's curiosity is piqued. He seems MORE than interested, and relentlessly presses Riker for details. At first, Riker is cautious, citing that the nature of the mission is volatile and confidential--but Picard points out that Riker already shared with him the mission. The rest is just filling in the blanks. Riker sighs, and takes his former captain (who we also learn in this scene, is now an Admiral) into his confidence.

We learn that a terrible civil war has erupted on Romulus, but that because of the insidious, secretive and strange political structure of the Romulan Star Empire, the "civil war" has quickly expanded to involve Romulus' twin planet Remus, as well as all of the conquered systems contained within their borders, as well as several outlying star systems. While it has yet to reach Federation space, Riker tells Picard that as of that morning fighting has broken out along the Romulan/Klingon border.

Picard: "But how does Spock...?"

Riker says he's not sure how or if Spock might be involved. But since he is there in an unofficial capacity without the permission of either Starfleet or the Vulcan government (or the Romulan government, for that matter), Riker has been ordered to take his ship, the Titan, go undercover into Romulan space, extradite Spock, and bring him home--whether Spock is willing or not.

Picard seems very distressed by this news.

Deanna Troi joins Riker and Picard, carrying a drink for her husband. Sensing the heaviness of the situation, she seeks to lighten it.

Troi: We're leaving for Romulus within the week, and there's a chance that we might actually see a strange and beautiful thing.

Riker smiles. Picard is momentarily perplexed, then he fixes them with an astonished look.

Picard: (in awe) The Phoenix Anomaly?

Troi: It circles the galaxy once every 12.3 trillion years. No one knows what it is...

Riker: But it should be making its way through Romulan space right about now. (With wonder in his eyes) They say it glows with all the colors of the universe.

Picard: Well then. I certainly hope that you'll have time from your more... grave duties to conduct a proper scientific survey.

Riker: I'll launch an extra probe for you, Admiral.

They all laugh. But as Riker and his wife depart, Picard's smile is replaced once more with a look of distress and concern.

EXT SHOT: CLASSIC 1960s TV TOS ENTERPRISE.

Floating in space, in orbit around Earth. This is a ship which is IDENTICAL to the Enterprise featured in the classic 1960s television series. In fact, it IS the Enterprise.

(This is actually the Enterprise-A, as seen in the Star Trek films, but it has been retrofitted to more closely resemble its earlier incarnation in the classic TV show)

INT: CLASSIC 1960s TV TOS ENTERPRISE.

The inside has been refurbished into a Starfleet museum, focusing on the many adventures of Kirk and his crew. Some rooms and displays appear as exact replicas of the old TV show, while others are more akin to sets from the movies (ST:1-6).

Re-enacting famous scenes and exploits, and also acting as tour guides and informational speakers are HOLOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS of Kirk's old crew: McCoy, Uhura, Scotty, Chekov, Sulu, Spock, Chapel, Rand, and even Kirk himself.

We focus on one scene in particular: Young holographic representations of a shirtless Kirk and an emotional Spock

are squared off, engaged in battle in a Vulcan sand-pit. They swing bladed weapons at one another. The two fight endlessly, as the old fighting music plays softly in the background.

A broad-shouldered man stands in silhouette, his back to the camera, watching the scene unfold over and over.

In the foreground several groups of museum-goers shuffle by. Several are talking among themselves. As holo-Spock swings his axe, slicing Kirk's chest, we can hear the gossipy conversation of the museum patrons, as they glance toward the "Spock" display.

"They're saying that HE'S the one responsible for the Romulan insurgence..."

"They said in subspace news that he actually instigated the war..."

"He isn't even supposed to BE over there..."

"They said that fighting's already started on the Federation outer colonies..."

"The Vulcan government is disclaiming any responsibility... But you can bet your ass that if he'd managed to actually achieve unification, rather than start a bloody war, those green-blooded bastards would be first in line to accept congratulations!"

"Unification! Ha--that's a joke!"

As the passersby clear out, only the man in silhouette is left in frame, still watching the holo-battle of ages past. He turns around and we see that it is James T. Kirk, dressed in civilian attire (jeans, t-shirt, vest). He has a dark, concerned look on his face.

ENTERPRISE-E. PICARD'S READY ROOM.

Picard is fixed on the subspace video monitor set at an angle into his desk. He is speaking to ADMIRAL JANEWAY.

Janeway brings Picard up to date. The Romulan civil war has spread out of control--factions fighting factions fighting factions. The Romulan Imperial Fleet itself has divided and rogue battalions are involved in everything from border skirmishes and outright piracy---attacking third-party planetary defenses, taking slaves, and provoking hostilities with their neighbors--most notably the Klingons, who are

mounting their own defenses and are about an eye-hair away from launching a massive counter-strike.

So far, Starfleet has remained uninvolved, and Federation diplomats have been working overtime to try and convince the Klingons NOT to escalate this conflict.

Janeway: We were lucky during the Dominion War, Jean-Luc--

Picard: (interrupting her) I don't know if I would call ANYTHING about that war lucky, Kathryn--other than perhaps your good fortune to have been nowhere near it.

Janeway: (Turning her eyes down, caught unawares by Picard's barb) We were lucky that, for whatever reason, the Borg chose not to take advantage of the situation. We won't be so lucky again, should the Romulans drag the entire quadrant into their war. Starfleet outposts have already detected three Cubes monitoring the situation."

Janeway continues to explain that Starfleet intelligence now believes that Spock was directly responsible (either on purpose or by accident) for the spark which ignited the war: the public execution by pro-Unification members of a high ranking political official who was adamantly opposed to Unification.

Picard: Spock would never knowingly support such an action.

Janeway: Nevertheless, there wouldn't even BE any pro-Unification groups, if Spock weren't down there proselytizing--without authority, I might add. Whether he supported this assassination or not is a moot point. The fact remains that Spock is over there illegally, and either directly or indirectly, he HAS set this war in motion. And Starfleet's number one concern right now is to stay OUT of that war... Unfortunately Spock has refused to answer any of our coded attempts to contact him via our underground spy network. And according to Starfleet Intelligence as of 0800 hours today, the ambassador has disappeared.

Picard: Disappeared?

Janeway: I've recently ordered Captain Riker to take the Titan into deep Romulan space and extradite the Ambassador. That mission has just become doubly complicated. Jean-Luc, I need to know if Riker is up to this. Can he get in there, find Spock, and get out without being detected? Without dragging the Federation into this insanity?

Surprisingly, Picard argues that indeed Riker is NOT up to the task. He cites his own unique relationship with both

Sarek and Spock, his own diplomatic skills and his familiarity with Romulan politics.

Picard: Will Riker is not the most... subtle Captain in the fleet.

Picard convinces Janeway to take the mission away from Riker and give it to HIM. It should be obvious that Riker will not be happy about this. Picard succeeds, and Janeway gives him this one last mission.

EXT. DEEP SPACE 9

The ENTERPRISE-E is docked alongside the DEFIANT on one of DS9's outer docking rings.

Geordie LaForge and Chief O'Brien are catching up on old times as they work. We're brought up to date on what has happened in their lives and their careers since last we met: Geordie is married with three children, who all live on the Enterprise-E where he is still Chief Engineer. O'Brien plans on leaving Starfleet, moving his family out to the country (dirt roads and lots of trees--maybe Earth!) and opening a repair shop. "DS9 just hasn't been the same since Sisko left," he says.

They are removing the Cloaking Device from the Defiant and refitting it for use on the Enterprise-E.

PICARD'S READY ROOM ABOARD THE ENTERPRISE-E

Picard is sitting at his desk, contemplating the mission ahead. In his hands, he holds a Vulcan medallion, a Kolinar symbol of perfect logic. Through the window of the ready room we can see the large pylons of DS9 where the Enterprise-E is currently docked.

The door chime sounds and Worf enters the room. He announces to Picard that he is very pleased to once again be taking command of the Defiant and to once again be working with his old Captain. Worf has received orders to escort the Enterprise-E into and out of Romulan territory.

Picard: Thank you for your eagerness, Mr. Worf, but unfortunately, those plans have been changed.

At Picard's request, the Defiant will no longer be used as an escort. Rather, the cloaking device is being removed from Worf's ship and is being transferred to the Enterprise-E.

Worf is perturbed, but offers to come aboard the Enterprise and serve under Picard for the mission.

Picard: Not this time, old friend. This time I go alone. This mission is... very personal to me.

Picard's eyes wander as he speaks, he seems lost in both the confusion of age and retrospect. A brief FLASHBACK MONTAGE of his mindmelds with both the late Sarek, and with Spock-- we are reintroduced to the unique depth of his relationship with the Vulcan father and son.

Worf interrupts his reverie, touting the dangers of entering a warzone. Picard again refuses his request to join the Enterprise team.

Picard: If things don't go well, you will be needed elsewhere, Mr. Worf. (Picard indicates the space beyond the window) If the Borg do decide to take advantage of the situation, DS9 and the wormhole to the Gamma Quadrant may very well be the first front lines.

Picard considers his long-time friend, then adds in a gentler tone. "This Romulan war is on the brink of flowing over their borders, Worf. The Klingon Empire is on the verge of retaliation against the insurgence at THEIR borders. I fear that any retaliation can only escalate this disaster. Perhaps your service is needed in a more... ambassadorial capacity? You might consider visiting the Klingon capital on Qu'onos..."

Worf starts to protest, but realizes that he has no argument. He turns and leaves, very disgruntled.

INT. DEEP SPACE 9

Worf wanders the halls of DS9 ignoring the 'hellos' of passersby. Cameos of various DS9 characters: Jake, Nog, Bashir. People step briskly out of Worf's way.

Worf nearly crashes into Ezri Dax (the Trill who carries the symbiont worm of his late wife Jadzia). They stare at one another, unable to speak. Then Worf turns away and ignores her as she calls to him. He breaks into a run.

He runs until he comes to the Promenade's Bajoran temple. After a brief consideration, he goes inside--this is the place where his wife Jadzia was murdered in cold blood by Gul Dukat. The temple is empty.

A brief FLASHBACK montage: Worf and Jadzia Dax's times together, ending with her murder in the temple. Worf's dark,

suicidal days following his wife's death. The arrival of Ezri Dax and Worf's refusal to accept her as being a new incarnation of his wife.

Worf is unable to contain his tears any longer, the years of pent-up frustration and sorrow. He falls to his knees, weeping loudly, a man without a wife, without a ship, without a home.

EXT. DEEP SPACE 9

A small, civilian shuttle flies through space and docks on DS9.

INT. DEEP SPACE 9

The airlock doors open to reveal JAMES KIRK. Kirk strides boldly through the halls of DS9, he is a man on a mission.

Kirk finds Picard in Quark's Bar drinking a steaming cup of Earl Grey tea. At first Picard is pleased to see his old friend, but it is immediately obvious that Kirk's business is urgent and serious.

Kirk is direct and to the point. He wants to go with Picard. Picard refuses, gently at first, then more strongly. Kirk is no longer a Starfleet officer, Picard argues, and he is too emotionally involved. There is no way that Starfleet would consider bringing a civilian, let alone one as notorious and close to Spock as Kirk, into a war zone. The situation requires delicacy, something Kirk is not known for.

Kirk: How do you know this? It's worth at least asking."

Picard: (smiling) Jim, I already know what they'll say because I already did ask them.

Kirk implores Picard to reconsider. He appeals to the man's emotions.

Kirk: You have no idea what it is to be... removed from your... logical side. Since Spock has been gone, it's as if half of my conscience has been stripped away... As if my sense of balance, of rationality, is somewhere out there... (Kirk indicates the stars through the windows) ...with him. You don't know what it is to lose the one who keeps you grounded.

Picard considers for a moment. Then he removes a small item from his pocket, places it on the bar and regards it sadly. If Kirk recognizes Data's emotion chip, he does not show it. "Yes," says Picard, "I do."

Kirk will not give up. "Then orders be damned. Take me anyway." Picard refuses. As the two argue, it also becomes obvious that they have very different takes on the role of the mission and Spock's involvement in the war.

Whereas Kirk's primary concern is in rescuing his friend (whom he believes must be in dire trouble), Picard is going under the assumption that he is extraditing a war criminal, retrieving a fugitive. True, Picard has personal connections to Spock, but unlike Kirk, Picard (perhaps even because of things he recalls from his mindmeld) is not nearly so convinced of Spock's "infallibility" as Kirk.

Picard unsuccessfully tries to assuage Kirk by saying that he WILL succeed in bringing Spock home, and that once the Vulcan is home he will be able to give his side of the story. Picard cannot help adding that Spock's silence and disappearance, however, do not make him look good.

Kirk: And you expect me to just... sit back and... wait. Damn it, you know me better than that, Picard.

The argument ends bitterly. Picard will not be swayed, and Kirk seems more desperate, more determined than ever.

EXT. DEEP SPACE 9/ENTERPRISE-E (DOCKED)

From outside, we can see Picard looking out through the window of his ready room.

Reflected in Picard's window we can see Kirk's shuttle leave its moorings on DS9 and drift slowly through space.

All of a sudden, the shuttle abruptly turns and speeds up. Soundlessly, the wormhole opens and the shuttle flies through.

Picard: (to himself) Where the hell is he going?

ACT TWO

KIRK'S RANCH. IOWA. EARTH

James Kirk sits in the rec room of his ranch house, reclining in a large comfortable chair, intently watching a video monitor set into the wall next to his fireplace. A large bay window looks out upon an endless expanse of pasture. The Sun shines through the open window, and there is not a cloud in the sky.

"...confusing reports are still coming in. Starfleet Command has not yet made a definitive stand on what, if any, action the Federation is prepared to take. President Somak is right now in a meeting with the Federation Council and the acting Romulan Ambassador. He is scheduled to make a statement at eleven..."

"...while no one wants to speculate about the possibility of interstellar war, it has been confirmed that Starfleet battleships are being redirected towards the recently reinstated Romulan Neutral Zone..."

Outside all is still. The sun beats down upon the dirt and the grass, and begins to set, into the horizon. Occasionally, a hawk will begin a lazy descent, gathering speed for another ascent into the sky. With a flapping of wings, each time rising a little higher, the hawk will continue its swooping, falling journey into the horizon.

On the horizon appears a single point of light. Almost unnoticeable, at first, lost in the sunset behind it, it continues to grow. Closer and closer, the light becomes brighter, even as the sky behind it fades into dusk. It grows larger as it draws closer, the image finally resolving into that of a small craft.

When the shuttle reaches the ranch, it slows to a hover, hangs momentarily in the air, and then settles gently to the ground.

A door slides open and a robust man steps out.

Kirk glances out the window, and quickly stands up. He rubs his eyes, squinting. The sun is directly behind the shuttle, creating a blinding glare, and a round silhouette.

James Kirk remains frozen in the open doorway of his ranch, while Montgomery Scott stands in front of the shuttle, his hands on the buckle of his belt, slowly shaking his head. For a time neither moves, and then they begin to slowly walk toward one another.

When they are close enough to shake hands, they square off, circling each other. Each seems unable to hide a concerned, unbelieving stare. It's as if the unreality of the situation is threatening to keep them forever apart. Then Scotty smiles.

Scotty: They told me on Reticula One that you were alive, but I dinna think it could be true.

Kirk: Scotty, you old space dog... (Kirk pauses. It's obvious that Scotty is younger, much younger than he.) You've never looked better.

Scotty: Aye, 'tis good to see you, Admiral.

Kirk: It's Jim now, Scotty. Just call me Jim.

Inside the ranch, Scotty stands in front of the large bay window, admiring the view. His hands are folded behind his back. Kirk paces anxiously, back and forth.

Scotty speaks slowly, still looking outside. "Ah. T'was sure you were gone when we lost you in the Nexus. I cashed in mah retirement, bought me own shuttle and scoured that area of space till Ah was sure you were gone and weren't comin' back." Scotty turns to face his old captain. "How DID you escape that Nexus?"

Kirk: (smiling) Oh that? It's a long story. When I got back, I heard you were missing.

Scotty: Aye. 'Tis a long story.

Kirk: Can I get you a drink, Scotty? I think I've got some Romulan ale around here somewhere... (Kirk begins to rummage through a liquor cabinet) Left over from--

Scotty: Aye. That ye could. (he turns and walks over to Kirk) But Ah've brought me own.

Scotty pulls a flask from his vest. "A little of the old bourbon. If ye ask me, that Romulan ale is more trouble than it's worth." He opens the flask and takes a swallow.

Scotty: To strange days.

He offers the flask to Kirk.

Kirk: Strange days... and absent friends.

Kirk drinks, and then holds up Scotty's flask. It is decorated with the Starfleet insignia, and bears the inscription, *Enterprise NCC 1701*. Kirk takes another swallow.

Scotty: So, am I to take it that ye had no trouble obtaining the device?

Kirk: I wouldn't say that. The Daystrom Institute's remote holo-research facility was... shall we say, less than willing to lend it out. Then again, they weren't prepared to deal with someone as... persuasive as myself.

Scotty: I'm sure the Gamma Quadrant will never be the same.

Kirk takes a small, blinking isolinear computer chip from his pocket and hands it to his friend.

Scotty takes the device, inspects it before putting it in his own pocket, and then walks back over to the window.

Scotty: So this is Iowa...

INT. STARFLEET MEDICAL STATION 8. DEEP FEDERATION SPACE

BEVERLY CRUSHER, Chief of Starfleet Medical, sits in her office with Admiral LEONARD "BONES" MCCOY. McCoy outranks her, if not in official stature, then in both years and experience. The man is closing in on 150 years old, and despite his wrinkles and his slow gait, he still retains all of his faculties and the twinkle in his eyes.

While Beverly is the acting Chief of Starfleet Medical, McCoy maintains an honorary position as Faculty Advisor. The two appear to be involved in a deep conversation.

Beverly Crusher: Starfleet is DETERMINED, beyond all common sense, to stay out of this war. We may not like it, but that's just the way it is.

Admiral McCoy: Well, young lady, that JUST MIGHT be the way it is (he fixes her with a wry grin and shakes a boney finger at her) But that sure as hell doesn't mean it's the way it's gotta be!

Through McCoy and Beverly's discussion we learn that the Federation has just lost several colonies along the Neutral Zone to the Romulans. Intent on staying out of the war, Starfleet has declared this to be an acceptable loss, and has taken no action to reclaim the colonies. Further, Starfleet has made it abundantly clear that anyone crossing the Neutral Zone under any circumstances will face the full penalty of law.

Bev and Bones primary concern, and the topic of their discussion, is for the welfare of the colonists, who have been deprived of medical supplies.

Crusher and McCoy hatch a plan to bring much needed medical aid to the struggling colonists. Using their authority as high-ranking Starfleet Medical officials, they prepare to commandeer a small, ragtag fleet of medical ships (which have no weapons and minimal shields) and illegally run the border of the Romulan Neutral Zone.

INT. BRIDGE. ENTERPRISE-E

Picard is sitting in his Command Chair studying a report on a small handheld PADD. Geordie LaForge is at the Bridge Engineering station, working busily.

Geordie sighs and walks over to Picard, a grim expression on his face.

Geordie: Well, the good news is that the cloak's working.

Picard: And the bad?

Geordie: I can't guarantee 100% efficiency. It just wasn't designed to hide a ship of this size.

Picard: I see. Well then, we'll just have to rely on a more... diplomatic approach in the event that we are discovered. Let's just hope that the Imperial Fleet is too preoccupied with fighting amongst themselves to worry about protecting their borders from cloaked Federation ships.

Geordie: (smirking) Which technically don't even exist.

Picard smiles wryly, and looks around the Bridge. The crew is comprised entirely of unfamiliar faces. Young cadets, fresh out of the Academy. Picard sighs.

Picard: So young... Were we ever that young, Geordie?

LaForge smiles and squeezes the Admiral's shoulder.

Picard: (in a loud, clear voice) Take us out, Ensign.
Prepare to engage the cloak on my command.

EXT. SPACEDOCK

The Enterprise-E slowly pulls out of Spacedock.

When it is halfway out of its moorings the cloak engages, creating the illusion that the ship disappears right from within the protective umbilicus of the docking facility.

INT. BRIDGE. ENTERPRISE-E

Picard is standing at the center of the Bridge, smiling wryly, and shaking his head.

Geordie: (sensing the rare dark humor that has come over Picard) What is it?

Picard: Something Riker said to me. Just before I came aboard...

Geordie: He looked pretty miffed.

Picard: (sharply) He'll get over it.

Geordie: What'd he say?

Picard: He was trying to protect me, to give me one last piece of advice. He said 'Never get out of the boat.'
(Picard smiles and grinds his teeth) Never get out of the boat. Absolutely Goddamned right.

Geordie frowns. Picard shakes himself from his dark humour and orders, "Warp 9... Engage!"

EXT. SPACEDOCK WINDOW

Standing in the window of the Spacedock, watching the departure of the Enterprise-E, is WILLIAM RIKER. He has a stern, angry expression on his face.

He stands, unmoving, with his hands clasped behind his back. Even after the ship is gone, he remains.

His wife, Deanna Troi appears behind him and takes his arm, but he does not budge. Sensing his mood, she leaves him.

EXT. STARFLEET MEDICAL STATION 8. DEEP FEDERATION SPACE

Open Space.

We hear a voice, crackled with the static of transmitting through the void, demanding. *"Return to your positions immediately. Repeat. You do not have the authority to leave your moorings. This is an unauthorized departure..."*

As the camera pans, we see first the massive Starfleet Medical space station, and then the shipyard and docking area next to it. Dozens of ships of all shapes and sizes are moored there. One of them is moving. It is an older ship, and has the distinct flat nacelles and bulbous saucer of a hospital ship. It is the *USS Beagle*.

Dock-master: *Return to your position immediately!*

Then another, larger ship--a freighter--begins to move, following the hospital ship. Then a small shuttle. Then another freighter.

Despite the frantic warnings of the dock-master, EIGHT SHIPS of various types leave the Starfleet Medical Station.

Dock-master: *This is your last warning..*

McCoy's voice comes over the subspace radio, interrupting him.

McCoy: Warn yourself, and let us go help those people!

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM. ENTERPRIS-E

Picard is being briefed by ensigns Toby and Trianna (both Betazoids) on the Romulan political situation. They give a brief history of the development of the Romulan Empire, its social and political structure and its current state of disarray.

Ensign Toby: The Romulans are a warlike race, most likely because of a genetic flaw which enables them to feel emotions much more strongly than other species, and thus they are driven to rash, emotional decisions. In effect, they are often led by their emotions, and are much more susceptible to the influences of anger, hatred, revenge, and love than are most other races.

Picard: A genetic flaw? Surely, just because their evolution has taken a particular course does not mean that they are flawed as a race.

Ensign Toby looks embarrassed, as if he's misspoke and made himself appear prejudiced or bigoted. He blushes.

Ensign Toby: While Romulans are by nature secretive, what art from their world has bled out into other cultures is considered to be truly awe-inspiring.

Picard: I'd like to believe that as intelligent, evolved species, we are all ABOVE our... genetic predispositions. Our emotions...

Ensign Trianna jumps into the conversation, covering her partner's indiscretion.

Ensign Trianna: The Vulcans would certainly agree with you on that point, Admiral. In fact, though the historical record is spotty at best, it is generally believed that both Vulcans and Romulans derive from the same genetic ancestry. That at some point in the far distant past, they split up-- the Vulcans left their home world to establish their own society. Perhaps, sensing their own uncontrollable emotions, the Vulcans adopted a strict social discipline of logic, in order to suppress them.

Picard: That is certainly what Ambassador Spock believes.

Toby: But regardless of their shared heritage, the Romulans are inarguably a warlike race. In the past two thousand years, it is impossible to count the number of planets conquered or species driven to extinction by them.

Trianna: And yet, by all counts they are a very religious and artistic people.

Picard: Religious?

Trianna: The predominant Romulan religion is known as Rihannsu. It is a belief in a lifestyle, a path--which they describe as a *River of Light*--by which all life will eventually come together to proceed to the next level of existence. An afterlife of perfect harmony and calmness.

Toby: Interestingly, although the River of Light is somewhat metaphorical, the underlying philosophy is not all that different from the atheistic beliefs of the Vulcan's own Kolinar.

Picard: The ultimate balancing of logic and emotion. Life and death. (He frowns) While this is all very interesting, I need to know what the Ambassador might've done to incite this war. And where he might be right now...

Toby: (thinking out loud) How COULD a Vulcan, working underground in a hostile government, achieve such influence?

Picard: (bitterly remembering his flawed clone) Shinzon did it. And not only was he human, but he was a slave on Remus. We can't understate one man's power to instigate change-- either for good or ill--nor can we underestimate the unique and dizzying political climate on Romulus. They are a paranoid race, dealing with an unprecedented upheaval.

A voice comes over the ship's intercom. "*Admiral to the Bridge. We are approaching the Romulan Neutral Zone.*"

Picard thanks them for their report, then turns to walk to the Bridge.

INT. TOS ENTERPRISE. MUSEUM

Throngs of museum patrons shuffle about, taking in the various holo-scenes and exhibits. All is well.

Suddenly RED LIGHTS and a soft, but unmistakable, WARNING KLAXON begin flashing and blaring.

A voice announces over the intercom that there is an emergency, but not to panic. Many people begin nervously murmuring their fears of a fire, failing life support, even a Romulan attack.

Suddenly, the holograms begin leaving their exhibits and helping with the evacuation procedures. A young Spock helps a mother push her anti-grav stroller. A young Sulu directs a group towards the nearest turbolift. Harry Mudd passes out vouchers for a free re-admittance to the museum, while Khan directs traffic towards the shuttle bay. Two Chekovs pass one another, briefly coordinate their efforts, then begin leading group after group to the public transporter rooms.

EXT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. MUSEUM

Several ferry ships, shuttles and pods depart the Enterprise as the emergency evacuation continues. A computer voice (the classic female voice from the TV show) instructs everyone to remain calm, and to proceed to the nearest exits.

Eventually, all of the shuttles and pods have departed. The ship has been evacuated.

INT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. BRIDGE

The Bridge of the Enterprise is an exact replica of the way that it appeared in the classic television series.

A young Kirk sits in his chair, flanked by a Dr. McCoy. The rest of the crew are at their stations: Spock, Sulu, Uhura, Chekov. Even Scotty and Rand are on the Bridge.

The Bridge doors slide open and the real Kirk and Scotty enter. Kirk stops in his tracks, utterly amazed at the sight before him. He looks as if he might laugh, as if he might cry.

Scotty: (at once frowning and smiling) This inna gonna do.

Scotty holds up the holographic interface chip that Kirk has stolen from the Daystrom Institute. Scotty has obviously made his own adjustments, and the chip now has several extensions and devices connected to it. Scotty works with the chip's controls, and after a moment the holograms of Kirk, Spock, Scotty and McCoy disappear, to be replaced by red-shirted unknowns.

Red-shirt #1 quickly vacates the Captain's chair, to make room for Kirk.

Scotty smiles and twists another knob on the device.

Kirk: (looking around) We've come home.

Scotty: Quite a gadget, it is! Ever since that holo-incident with the Doctor out on Voyager, the Daystrom Institute's been mighty keen on locking down any chance of a developing sentience in these holograms. But this device unlocks a whole gamut of subroutines and calculating potential that's all but illegal, these days.

KIRK: So you're saying that they'll be able to function as well as the real thing?

Scotty: Aye. Almost...

Kirk: (settling into the Captain's Chair) Then what are we waiting for? Warp 8!

EXT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. MUSEUM

The museum ship slowly begins to turn, moving for the first time in decades. Amazingly, the warp nacelles begin to glow, the engines hum to life, and there is a rainbow blur as the ship warps away!

Kirk: (VOICE-OVER) Scotty, you truly are a miracle worker!

EXT. ROMULUS. SPACE

The aftermath of tremendous warfare. Dozens of Romulan warbirds drift about, wrecked hulks amid the debris of dozens, if not hundreds of other ships. Fires still rage in the floating wreckage.

In the distance, in all directions, battles are still being fought. We can see the glow and flash of phaser fire and photon detonations.

On the planet's surface we can see explosion after explosion as heavy artillery wreaks havoc.

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

The Enterprise-E has entered Romulan space under cloak. They have come out of warp above the planet Romulus.

Picard sits in his chair, silently contemplating the devastation all around them on the viewscreen.

Picard: (VOICE-OVER) Admiral's log, Stardate 465617.3. We have arrived at the Romulan homeworld. The effects of war are devastating, and the battles are still raging all around us. It has been six hours and there has been no response to our coded hail. My instincts tell me that Spock, if he is still alive, is no longer on the planet's surface. But as to where he might be, no answers seem to be forthcoming...

Picard: Ensign. Send out a hail on this scrambled frequency (Picard hands his PADD to the Ensign) We can only hope that the Romulans remember their alliances.

EXT. FEDERATION COLONIES. THE NEUTRAL ZONE

The colonies exist on the seven moons of the planet Endros, an enormous gas giant.

The eight ships comprising Bones' and Beverly's makeshift medical fleet are gathered near the largest of the moons.

In the distance, just beyond the edge of the planetary system, practically dwarfing the entire system, is an amazing sight. What appears to be an enormous BLACK HOLE in space surrounded by a fiery white corona seems impossibly large. It is silent and motionless, an impossible, unblinking eye.

The most unusual feature of the phenomenon is the stream of blue energy flowing out from it--a long, thin winding ribbon of light, trailing and wavering like a rolled out carpet, or the tail of a kite.

INT. THE USS BEAGLE. BRIDGE

Beverly Crusher sits in the command seat of the medical ship USS Beagle. Admiral McCoy sits in the first officer's station. The rest of the crew is eclectic--many of them are medically trained. A few in key positions are non-Starfleet. Hired hands, boasting civilian clothes and scruffy, unshaved faces.

McCoy and Beverly (along with the rest of the crew) are staring at the anomaly on the viewscreen.

McCoy: What the hell is that thing?

Beverly: (shaking her head) I have no idea.

A warning beep emits from a nearby control panel.

Crewman #1: (anxiously) We've got a ship coming out of warp! It's a Romulan warbird... The Instigator... it's changing direction... heading right for us.

Beverly: how long?

Crewman #1: I'd say fifteen minutes, tops.

McCoy: Then what are we waiting for. Let's start beaming down those supplies. Snap to it!

EXT. ROMULAN HOMEWORLD

High above the planet Romulus, a lone WARBIIRD sits in space. It is moderately damaged, as if only making a brief stop between battles.

The Enterprise-E decloaks. It is some distance away from the warbird.

For a timeless moment the two ships face one another, unmoving.

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

Picard: Take her in slow, Ensign. Hail them.

On the viewscreen Commander Donatra appears, the female Romulan commander who came to Picard's aid against Shinzon's coup in the film "Star Trek: Nemesis".

Commander Donatra tries to hide her surprise at seeing Picard and the Enterprise-E in Romulan space. Picard clears his throat and offers a greeting in Romulan.

Picard: Aihkhmiite aitia akhitha, equitorum.

Donatra answers him in her own language with a smile. Her words are translated via TITLE CARD: "You speak Romulan like a Klingon cow, Picard."

Picard laughs.

Donatra: (reading the pips on Picard's collar) ADMIRAL Picard, it is... good to see you once again. Though you must understand that these circumstances are quite... unusual.

Picard smiles, trying his best to remain unthreatening and give an air of easygoing informality.

Picard: Indeed, I do, Commander. This situation is, if nothing else, unusual. I can assure that I am here in the interest of peace and expedience. The Federation has absolutely no intention of involving themselves in your... situation.

Donatra considers his words carefully before answering.

Donatra: How can I be of assistance, Admiral?

Picard changes his tone to one of great confidentiality, giving Donatra the impression that he is involving her in a personal confidence, as a friend and comrade. And in a way, he is.

Picard: Commander, I need to know the last known location of Ambassador Spock.

Donatra: I understand. (There is a long pause as she glances offscreen) I am transferring the coordinates on a coded frequency now.

Picard smiles broadly.

Donatra: But there is something that you must understand, Picard. We will never 'reunify'. THIS is our home. It has been so for two thousand years. There is something to say for that.

Picard: (sadly) Indeed there is, Domatra.

Domatra: (sighs) There was nothing here when we came. And it was so long ago that it is gone even from our cultural memory. But we civilized it. A place belongs to those who bring light to it, don't you agree?

Picard: (softly) What will you do after the war?

Domatra: All that any of us can, Captain. Just follow my footsteps, one at a time, trying to answer the little questions and staying away from the big ones. All the while searching for the River of Light.

Picard: (intrigued) River of light?

Domatra: (as if lost in thought) The river is beautiful, Captain. Even if these times are not. (She regains her composure) Good luck finding your missing Vulcan, Picard.

Picard: Thank you, Commander. And I believe I still owe you that Romulan ale.

Domatra: Take care, Picard. And Godspeed.

Her image on the viewscreen is replaced by that of space and her ship, which turns to leave, cloaking as it does.

INT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. BRIDGE

Kirk is sitting in his command chair, while Scotty works busily at the Engineering console nearby.

Kirk seems lost in his own thoughts, and is staring sadly at the holographic representation of a young Hikaru Sulu, stationed at the navigation console.

Kirk seems to be speaking to himself, but when he begins talking Scotty glances over, listening.

Kirk: Sulu died alone. After his daughter Demura was lost with all hands on the Excelsior, Sulu became a recluse. Uhura told me that even Chekov couldn't get through to him..

Kirk seems to regain his composure.

Kirk: I will not let Spock die alone. Not again.

Scotty: Aye.

Ensign: Captain. We are entering the Romulan Neutral Zone.

The holographic Uhura looks up, holding a hand to the device in her ear.

Uhura: Captain! I'm receiving a distress signal. It's on a coded frequency. It's weak, but it's definitely Starfleet.

Kirk sits up.

Kirk: Let's hear it.

The voice that crackles over the speakers is female, and is garbled in places. *"This is the . . .-ical ship . . .Beagle . . . unauthorized transport of medical supplies . . . --several medical personnel, including Admiral Leonard McCoy . . We are . . . Repeat. We are under attack . . ."*

Kirk looks at Scotty. Neither says a word. Then the Sulu hologram speaks, in its familiar deep voice.

Sulu: Changing course to intercept the Beagle. Let's go rescue Doctor McCoy.

INT. THE USS BEAGLE. BRIDGE

The Beagle is being pounded by light phaser fire from The Instigator.

Beverly: I will not be responsible for starting a war.

Bones: Lady, look out your window. The war's already started.

Beverly: This doesn't make sense, why haven't they finished us. We've got practically no shields and no weapons to speak of...

Bones: Maybe they enjoy playing with their prey.

Beverly frowns. Another hit shakes the Bridge.

Beverly: Well, they can play with us all they want, but I will not let them fire on those colonies.

Bones: Oh, I agree. Moving us between them and the colonies was a WONDERFUL idea. It's been a long time since I've been privy to such crazy tactical notions.

Beverly: (frustrated) Hail them again!

Crewman #1 flicks a switch on his console and then frowns. "Still ignoring us, Doctor."

Beverly: Damn. Are all the supplies beamed down?

Crewman #2: Almost...

Bones: But damned good that'll do anyone if the Romulans-- (he's cut off by yet another phaser blast.) Dammit woman, try talking to them...

Beverly: (nodding) Open a channel. This is Doctor Beverly Crusher of the medical starship (explosion) Beagle. We request that you stand down. (Explosion). We are prepared to surrender in the name of peace, and-- (a double-explosion, as a moderate phaser sweep hits the port nacelle)

On the viewscreen we can see the hull of one of the other medical freighters in the blockade buckle. The ship explodes.

McCoy: (yelling angrily at the opened hailing channel) Damn you, you green-blooded Romulan bastards. Those are innocent people on the colonies, and we are a medical relief team... We are unarmed!

The firing stops.

There is a long pause and then Crewman #1 announces, "Doctor, they're hailing us."

Beverly: On screen.

The Instigator's image on the viewscreen is replaced with the image of the ship's commander. It is Ambassador Spock.

INT. ROMULAN BUNKER

This is the same bunker that we saw Spock in at the beginning. It is empty save for a thin sleeping pad, a footlocker, and a small writing table.

We hear the high-pitched whine of the transporter effect, and the unmistakable glow of someone beaming in.

Picard materializes in the stone chamber. He quickly begins looking around and scanning the room with his tricorder. In the distance we can hear explosions and warfare.

In the footlocker he finds a journal. He opens it, flips through it, skimming, and stops at a page near the end. He begins reading aloud.

Picard: (reading) *Logic is the beginning of wisdom. Emotion is the gateway to understanding. All things flow along the River of Light. These are the End Times. This is the*

beginning. Peace breeds war, and war breeds peace. Life and death, birth and rebirth. Fire and change. (Picard frowns) The Phoenix is the answer.

Picard: (to himself) The Phoenix, my god... he's gone mad. (he taps the commbadge on his chest) Geordie, beam me up.

Still holding the book in his hand, he dematerializes.

INT. THE USS BEAGLE. BRIDGE

McCoy and Spock stare at one another across the vastness of space. McCoy's expression is one of shock and concern. Spock's, one of wincing pain, frustration and a desperate fight for control. His jaw is clenched and rivulets of sweat mark his brow. His voice is strained, and he seems almost unable to focus.

Spock: Doctor McCoy, it is... agreeable to see you again.

Bones: Don't you "Doctor McCoy" me, Spock. What the hell is going on here? What in blazes do you think you're doing?

Spock: I am on the threshold of great things...

Beverly: Why are you firing on us? On the colonists?

Spock: War is sacrifice. The elimination of the machinations of evil. The fever must run its course, the fire must burn itself out. The innocent must die so that the innocent might live... Am I not living proof of that, Doctor?

Bones: My god, man... You're haunted.

Spock: I assure you Doctor, I do not believe in ghosts.

Communications officer: Doctor, there's another ship coming into range.

EXT. FEDERATION COLONIES. THE NEUTRAL ZONE

Dwarfed by the enormous spatial anomaly, the seven remaining medical ships and the warbird square off in space, high above the moons of Endros.

At great speed another ship enters the fray. It is the CLASSIC ENTERPRISE.

INT. THE USS BEAGLE. BRIDGE

Seeing the approach of his old ship, Spock breaks communication with McCoy and his image disappears from the viewscreen. It is replaced with the image of the CLASSIC ENTERPRISE slowing to a halt, strategically placing itself between the warbird and the Beagle.

Bones: I don't believe it... something's not right. Not even that green-blooded sonavabitch could be so--

Beverly: He's not well.

Bones: You're damned right he's not!

Beverly: I mean that I believe that he's suffering from some sort of mental aberration. He seemed to be struggling with his thoughts, drifting in and out of lucidity.

Bones: Maybe all those arguments I won finally took their toll...

Beverly: Sarek suffered from a rare form of Bendii syndrome. In the end he was incapable of controlling his own emotions. Bendii is inherited genetically. It's very possible that Spock is suffering from a variant form of the disease.

Communications officer: Doctor, there's another ship decloaking. (Surprised) It's the Enterprise!

EXT. FEDERATION COLONIES. THE NEUTRAL ZONE

The Enterprise-E decloaks alongside the fleet of medical freighters. It inches its way closer to the Instigator.

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

Picard stares awestruck at the anomaly, which dwarfs all of the ships on his viewscreen.

Picard: The Phoenix... Geordie?

Geordie: Scanning... (shaking his head) it doesn't make sense, Admiral. The closest thing I can tell you is that it has most of the earmarks of a black hole, but the gravitational effect seems restricted to a precise energy band, and has no pull whatsoever on physical matter.

Picard: Can you--

Ensign: Admiral!

Picard looks at the viewscreen just in time to see a fleet of twelve Romulan warbirds decloaking behind the Instigator.

Picard: Damn.

Geordie: They've probably been here all along. Laying low until the big guns arrived... which we just did.

Picard: Hail the Instigator.

SPOCK's image appears on the viewscreen.

Picard stands up, trying his best not to appear surprised.

Picard: Ambassador Spock. I am here to take you back.

Geordie: (shaking his head) Admiral, I've got nine more ships coming in. Their warp signature is... it's the Vulcan Task Force.

Spock: I am sorry, Picard. But I have other plans.

Picard: (his mind racing to piece this mystery together) Ambassador... The anomaly. Is that the... Is that the River of Light that you spoke of in your journal?

Spock raises an eyebrow.

Spock: The "river of light" is the common denominator between Vulcan theoretical logic and Romulan mythology.

Picard: (knowing it's a futile gesture) Ambassador, please lower your shields so we can beam you aboard.

Suddenly the Romulan fleet opens fire on the Vulcan Task Force. Spock turns wildly, studying a monitor at his side, off-screen.

Spock: No! Not like this!

Spock cuts off communication. On the viewscreen we can now see the beginnings of a massive battle. The Romulan Fleet and the Vulcan Task Force are exchanging heavy fire, while Kirk's Enterprise struggles to shield the medical fleet from harm. The instigator and the Enterprise-E stand off to the side of the battle.

Picard: Geordie, can we use a focused phaser blast to punch through the Instigator's shields and beam Ambassador Spock aboard?

Geordie: We can try, Admiral, but she's heavily armored, and packing quite a wallop.

Picard: Make it so.

The Enterprise-E begins firing a strong, focused beam on the Instigator. The Instigator backs off, and fires a warning photon.

Ensign: Admiral Picard, we are being hailed by James Kirk of the... of the Enterprise.

Kirk appears on the viewscreen.

Kirk: Dammit, Picard! What are you doing? Stop firing. Let me talk to him, I can get through to him.

Picard: There's no time, Jim. We--

Kirk: Damn you! You've... got to... let me try...

A CLOSE-UP on Picard as he struggles to make the right choice. Things are moving too fast, events are spiraling out of control.

When we cut back to the viewscreen, there is a red-shirted officer standing behind Kirk, with his back to the camera. He was not there before. (This should look to the viewer like a continuity error.)

Picard: I'm sorry, Jim, but I--

The red-shirted figure behind Kirk turns around and smiles at Picard. It is Q.

Q: I'll be with you in one moment, Jean-Luc.

Q snaps his fingers and image on the viewscreen is replaced by that of the space battle.

ACT 3

INT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. BRIDGE

Kirk and Q face each other on the Enterprise's Bridge. Q is wearing a red "classic Trek" uniform.

Kirk: Who the hell are you and what are you doing on my ship?

Q: (laughing) Your ship? Oh, that's priceless. But I think you've got it backwards, Jim... Do you mind if I call you Jim? Or do you prefer TIBERIUS? But I digress. It's not your ship, it's a museum. But actually, it's YOU who belongs in one.

Scotty is attempting to sneak up behind Q with a phaser. Without looking back, Q snaps his fingers and Scotty stops moving, frozen.

Kirk: What do you want?

Q: Go home, Jim. You don't belong here.

Kirk: I'm sorry, but I can't do that.

Q: Why not? When Spock died the first time you went through hell and high water to bring him back. You risked your life. Your friend's lives. Your career... and what did it get you?

Kirk doesn't answer, but he appears to be weighing the possibility of tackling Q or kicking him in the balls.

Q: And when YOU died--TWICE, I might add--what did the cold-blooded Vulcan ever do for you? Absolutely nothing! He went on sabbatical! Some friend..

Kirk hauls back to take a swing, but Q interrupts him.

Q: Oh, look! The photons are flying!

Q disappears and Scotty unfreezes as Kirk turns to the viewscreen just in time to see an errant photon torpedo bearing down on them.

Kirk: Hang on!

And explosion sends sparks flying across the Bridge.

Scotty recovers and heads for the turbolift.

Scotty: Ah'll be in Engineering...

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

Q appears on the Bridge of the Enterprise-E. He is now wearing a red "Next Generation" style uniform. His pips denote his rank as Vice-Admiral.

Picard: (without batting an eye) How are you involved in this, Q?

Q: (with exaggerated innocence) Moi? Why, it's not about me, Picard. This time, it's all about you.

Picard: Don't play games with me, Q. The stakes are much too high.

Q: I wouldn't dream of... "playing games" as you so eloquently put it. The galaxy is once again at the brink of catastrophe, and here you are smack in the middle of it. It's enough to make one giddy. (leaning in and whispering conspiratorially to Picard) And I have my sources, Jean-Luc--this war, if it happens, is going to make that little Dominion misunderstanding look like kids playing in a sandbox.

On the viewscreen the battle outside is becoming more intense.

Picard: What do you mean, "It's all about me?" WHAT is about me?

Q: Just what I said. Clean that wax out of your ears, Picard. Everything. It's all about you and me, right here, right now, having this very conversation.

Picard: (carefully pondering Q's riddles) What are you saying Q? That you led me here? That you started this conflict just so that we could talk?

Q: (laughing) You're thinking too small, Jean-Luc. As usual.

Picard: Are you saying that you convinced Spock to go to Romulus?

Q laughs.

Q: I'm saying that I convinced the Vulcans to segregate from the Romulans! To leave the Alpha quadrant! To form an empire. Thousands of years of terror and war--billions of lives lost,

countless civilizations enslaved or hunted to extinction by the savage Romulan Star Empire... All so that YOU and I could have this conversation.

Picard: My god...

Q: Makes you feel rather insignificant, doesn't it?

Picard: On the contrary, Q, I'm flattered. But I don't believe that even you would go to all that trouble just to... annoy me.

Q: tsk, tsk... Now, now Picard. Don't underestimate your own importance in all this. Or your own culpability.

Picard: (flabbergasted) MY culpability? Have you truly gone off the deep end, Q? Have you truly orchestrated a full scale galactic war just for my benefit?

Q: (blushing with false modesty) They called me Rihannsu on Romulus... Bubba-balla on Ritheria 12... (Q seems to enjoy this dalliance down memory lane) Ho-Trex on Capricorn. I even went by Zeus and Hey-Zeus, Buddha and a few others on your dear old Earth...

Picard: This is insanity.

Q: (gleefully wringing his hands) Yes, it is.

INT. CLASSIC ENTERPRISE. BRIDGE

Kirk is leaning tensely forward in his chair, staring at the battle on the viewscreen. His ship takes hit after hit as he maneuvers about, shielding the medical fleet from phasers and photons.

Kirk: Is the channel open?

Uhura: It is, Captain.

Kirk: Spock... I know you're out there... I know you can hear me, old friend... It's Jim, Spock... Spock... Talk to me...

Uhura: We're being hailed.

Kirk: On screen!

The image of a Romulan high-commander appears onscreen. Though Kirk, of course, does not recognize her, this is Tasha Yar's half-Romulan daughter, the Romulan high-commander SELA.

Sela: Drop your shields and prepare to be boarded. This will be your only warning.

Uhura: We're being hailed again... It's Mr. Spock!

Kirk: On screen!

The Romulan Sela is cut off, and her image is quickly replaced by that of Spock. Kirk stands up, unconsciously reaching towards his friend.

Spock appears to be an emotional wreck. Tears stream down his cheeks, and his face is strained, and if in great emotional torment.

Kirk: Spock... What's happened?

Spock: I had such plans... such hopes... Jim, it was not supposed to end like this.

Spock seems to be struggling, desperately trying to stop the flood of uncontrollable emotions that are coursing through him.

Kirk: Spock, it doesn't have to end like this... let me come to you...

Spock: (lost in thought or delusion) My river... the light... my people... my world... my ideas... (he looks at Kirk)... my friends...

Kirk: (to his crew) Can we beam him aboard?

Chekov: Not while his shields are up.

Spock holds up his hand in the traditional Vulcan salute.

Spock: Goodbye, Jim...

Jim: Spock! Don't do this!

Spock: The horror... is not logical.

Spock breaks the connection. On the viewscreen we can once again see the battle raging. The Vulcan Task Force has fully engaged the Romulan fleet.

Suddenly the Instigator turns and begins to accelerate. Spock is placing himself DIRECTLY BETWEEN THE ROMULAN AND VULCAN CONFLICT.

It is over quickly. The Instigator takes several hits from both sides, then seems to catch fire from within. A moment

later the ship explodes, a fiery sunburst against the black void of the Phoenix Anomaly.

For a moment the battle wanes, as both sides wait to see what the other will do.

Kirk: (sullen and defeated, to no one in particular) He was the tragedy... the tragedy of this war.

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

Picard watches the destruction of the Instigator in silence. He has failed his mission. As he watches, the battle seems to momentarily wane, and then one of the warbirds opens fire on a Vulcan Task Force cruiser.

Another warbird turns its sights on the medical fleet. The damaged CLASSIC ENTERPRISE bravely positions itself between the warbird and the medical ships.

Just then, the TITAN flies into the battle. Riker's voice comes briefly over the open channel.

Riker: Looks like someone could use a hand out here.

Ignoring Riker's arrival, Picard remains focused on Q.

Picard: Stop this right now, Q.

Q: Oh, you don't have to call me Q, if you don't want to Picard. The novelty of that letter has long since worn off. You can simply call me "God" if you prefer. Much more apropos, if I do say so myself.

Picard: (turning to Q) You're insane.

Q: Insane? I'm not the one poised out here in an iron coffin with the triggers cocked.

Picard: (losing his temper) You are the one who created this situation!

Q: I set things in motion. I merely created the OPPORTUNITY, which, I might add, you people gleefully embraced, giggling like wards of the State.

Picard: You've started a war, Q. Countless wars.

Q: (rhetorically) What is war, Picard, if not an opportunity for peace? What is a room, if not four walls a floor and a ceiling?

Picard: Are you trying to tell me there's an opportunity here?

Q: (speaking very slowly, very earnestly) A bigger one than you could possibly imagine, Jean-Luc. Think Picard! Use your brain, it's the best, most wonderful piece of (he spits the word) 'technology' that you own! Shed your skin. Think outside of the box.

Picard: People are dying out there.

Q: But it doesn't have to go that route, Picard. All of those big, mean killing machines. All of that firepower. Technology is a crutch, a bad habit. It's the thin shell that protects the egg when young, but suffocates life unless it is shattered and left behind.

Picard looks outside. The battle is heating up. Kirk's Enterprise is taking a pounding, as are several of the medical ships. One of the Vulcan Task Force cruisers takes a volley of photon torpedoes and explodes as its shields collapse.

Q: What IS a room, Picard? Is it the walls, ceiling and floor? Or is it the space in between them?

Picard studies the battle, desperately trying to clear his mind and make sense of Q's words. The Beagle takes a massive hit and begins to careen wildly.

Q: Oh well, Picard. Can't say you didn't try. It was nice knowing you. A good effort. After all, what is war, if not the absence of peace? What becomes of the room when the walls fall away?

Picard: Q, Is this the chicken and the egg again? Another paradox?

Q: (laughing) The chicken and the egg is a riddle for children, Picard. For drooling babies. Paradoxes are kids' stuff! This is IMPORTANT, Jean-Luc. Use that brain, it's the most advanced equipment you've got!

One of the Romulan ships goes dead, and is caught in the moon's gravity well. It begins to glow and burn as it falls towards the moon's surface.

Q: (shaking his head) It doesn't have to end this way...

Picard: (slowly, working out his thoughts as he speaks them) The Romulans believe that the River of Light is the culmination of all things, a calming of emotions, a finality beyond death...

Q: See where religion gets you? You're not even close, Picard.

Picard: The Vulcans are ruled by logic. They see no use in emotion...

Q: See where lack of faith gets you?

Picard: But it is our technology that DEFINES us, makes us what we are. It's a symbol, a manifestation, of our development as a culture, as a species...

Q: You're beginning to sound like the Borg. Look at ME, Jean-Luc. Look at the Continuum. You don't see us flying around in clunky starships and pointing those silly tricorders at everyone we meet...

Picard: But I can't change the nature of...

Q: It only takes one, Picard. One cancerous cell to corrupt the entire organism, one grain of sand to start an avalanche. The chicken doesn't realize he's alone until he leaves the egg.

Picard turns to Q. A faint glimmer of understanding lighting in his eyes.

Q: Evolution is a leap of faith.

Picard turns to his crew.

Picard: Geordie, power down the weapons. Drop the shields.

Geordie: Admiral?

Picard: Don't question, just do it. Prepare to eject the warp core.

Geordie: (believing that he must have heard wrong) What? With the core running that hot it's gonna blow if we eject it, and with our shields down--

Picard: Just do it! And move us into the center of the fray.

Geordie: (obviously not agreeing with the decision) All right...

EXT. FEDERATION COLONIES. THE NEUTRAL ZONE

The ENTERPRISE-E moves into the center of the battle. It takes several hard hits with its shields down. Then it slows, and ejects its blazing warp core into space.

The fighting briefly stops as everyone pauses to evaluate the situation. One of the Romulan ships begins to back away from the volatile warp core and its imminent explosion.

INT. THE TITAN. BRIDGE

Riker is standing on the Bridge of his ship watching the unusual actions of the Enterprise-E.

Riker: (to himself) ...the HELL are you doing, Jean-Luc?

Ensign: Several of the warbirds are backing away from the core, sir.

Riker: It doesn't make any sense...

Riker rubs his chin.

Riker: Hail the Enterprise-E.

Communications Officer: No response, sir.

Riker: This is damned strange.

Deanna Troi steps up behind her husband and takes his hand in hers.

Troi: Will... I can't explain it, but... he KNOWS what he's doing, and he... he needs to you trust him. And to follow him...

Riker: (frowning and shaking his head) Goddamn you, Picard.

EXT. THE TITAN

Riker's ship the Titan hangs on the edge of the battle for a long moment, and then follows suit. Riker drops his shields and ejects his own warp core.

After a long moment, the Beagle does the same. Then Kirk's Enterprise. They are followed by the medical ships and after a moment the remaining members of the Vulcan Task Force.

The Romulan fleet stands poised over the now defenseless vessels. Then Sela's ship lowers its shields and its warp core is ejected into space. The other warbirds follow suit.

INT. ENTERPRISE-E. BRIDGE

The viewscreen is filled with drifting, powerless ships and fiery, spinning warp cores. It is an amazing sight.

Geordie: Our core's going critical!

A deep explosion rocks the Bridge. Its effects on the ship are devastating.

Q: I've never shown you my true face, Picard.

Q reaches up and with his dexterous fingers he peels his off his own face, then his entire body. Revealed beneath his human flesh and Starfleet uniform is a being of pure, brilliant white light and large black eyes filled with stars.

Picard stares at this new incarnation of his nemesis, unsure what to think, say, or do...

Geordie: (through the smoke and flames) Something's happening with the anomaly!

On the viewscreen we can see dozens, then hundreds of points of light emerging from the black center of the Phoenix Anomaly. The iris around the black hole has taken on a deep blue tone, making it look even more like an eye. The ribbon of blue light trailing out from it is growing, expanding, running out further and further towards the drifting ships, streaming from the anomaly's center.

Picard: The River of Light...

Q: Congratulations, Picard. You've taken your experience to a whole new level. You've evolved your race. For the first time since I helped that that smartass monkey hit his brother with a bone, you've taken your people to a new level of being. (Q's voice becomes sincere) I'm proud of you, Jean-Luc. Where you're going now you won't need starships or tricorders, but the exploration that awaits is beyond your wildest imaginings.

Q reaches out and takes Picard's hand. His fingers of pure light enclose Picard's flesh. On the viewscreen we can see thousands of points of light entering through the hulls of other ships, as well as several hundred drawing closer to the Enterprise-E. And countless more are streaming out of the anomaly.

Q turns and gently pulls a surprised Picard after him. They fall right through the hull of the ship as if it weren't even there, and out into the brilliant vastness of space. All around we can see the crews of the other ships coming

through the hulls (Romulans, Vulcans, and Humans alike). Each one is being led by the hand by a light being identical to Q.

All around them warp cores go critical and explode, ships careen and crash--but silently and harmlessly, adding to the brilliance and the beauty all around them.

When all of the crews have been taken from their ships, the pairs fly gracefully towards the river of blue light and on into the Phoenix Anomaly.

INT. PHOENIX ANOMALY

Despite the blackness outside, inside the Anomaly is pure white light. No walls, no discernible structures. Just pure, unending light.

Pair by pair the light beings and crewmembers arrive. The light beings let go of the hands of their partners and walk off into the light.

Kirk arrives first and, squinting his eyes, sees a form in silhouette waiting for him. It is his son David. "I've been waiting for you, Dad," David embraces him.

Behind David is Spock. He is unable to control his ear-to-ear grin. "Jim, it's wonderful!"

Picard is greeted by his brother, his sister-in-law, and his nephews, all lost in a house fire several years back. He goes to them and hugs them, and when he looks up he sees Data, standing in the distance and smiling.

EXT. PHOENIX ANOMALY

We pull back out of the anomaly to see that thousands, millions, billions more points of light are pouring from it and streaming out to all corners of space.

Brief montage: Cruising through space, we witness millions of lights descending upon the twin planets Romulus and Remus, then Vulcan. Then we shift over to Earth, where billions of lights are now leaving the planet and drifting off in pairs into the endless reaches of space.

FADE TO WHITE.

EXT. EARTH. DAY

Earth. A bright, sunny day.

The cities and buildings are now long empty. Plants and vines have overgrown everything. Birds tweet. Nature has reclaimed its own.

The hulk of an ancient fallen starship (finally pulled down from its decaying orbit) is a monolithic reminder of man's legacy. It is overgrown with moss and ferns.

On the ground we see a small, dirty device which has outlasted the years. A Tricorder. A small chipmunk-like creature happens upon it, and begins punching buttons with curious paws. Lights flicker and the device emits a few strangled beeps.

Suddenly two black polished boots enter the scene, scaring the animal away.

The boots belong to Q, once again in his more familiar human form, wearing a red Starfleet uniform. He looks around at the empty world. The breeze blows gently through the trees. The sun is setting, and the first of the brightest stars are coming out.

He smiles warmly, snaps his fingers and--

ROLL END CREDITS

After Credits, Title Card:

BOLDLY GO...

End.